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*For Jonathan,
with much love and deep respect*

Book I

*WE THREE KINGS OF ORIENT ARE,
BEARING GIFTS WE TRAVERSE AFAR...*

The band of carollers huddled at the corner, stamping their feet and swinging their arms, their young voices penetrating the cold night air between the harsh sounds of automobile horns and police whistles and the metallic strains of Christmas music blaring from speakers above garishly lighted store fronts. The snowfall dense, snarling traffic, causing the hordes of last-minute ers to shield their eyes and somehow manage to side-step ly lurching automobiles as well as mounds of slush and other. Tyres spun on the wet streets; buses inched in maddening starts and stops, and the bells of uniformed Santas kept up their incessant if futile clanging.

*FIELD AND FOUNTAIN,
MOOR AND MOW-AN-TEN...*

A dark Cadillac sedan turned the corner and crept past the carollers. The lead singer, dressed in a costume that was somebody's idea of Dickens' Bob Cratchit, approached the right rear window, his gloved hand outstretched, his face contorted in sonnet next to the glass.

FOLLOWING YA-HON-DER STAR...

The angry driver blew his horn and waved the begging caroller away, but the middle-aged passenger in the back seat reached

Fiftieth Street thanks you. Merry Christmas, sir!

he words would have been more effective had there not been a touch of whisky emanating from the mouth that yelled them.

'Merry Christmas,' said the passenger, pressing the window down to shut off further communication.

There was a momentary break in the traffic. The Cadillac slowed down only to be forced to an abrupt, sliding stop thirty feet in the street. The driver gripped the steering wheel; it was a rare that took the place of cursing out loud.

'Take it easy, Major,' said the grey-haired passenger, his tone of voice at once sympathetic and commanding. 'Getting upset won't solve anything; it won't get us where we're going any faster.'

'You're right, General,' answered the driver with a respect he did not feel. Normally, the respect was there, but not tonight, not on this particular trip. The general's self-indulgence aside, he had one hell of a nerve requesting his aide to be available for duty on Christmas Eve. For driving a rented, *civilian* car to New York so the general could play games. The major could think of a number of acceptable reasons for being on duty tonight, but this was not one of them.

Where house Stripped of its verbal skills, that's what it was. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff was going to a *whorehouse* on Christmas Eve! And because games were played, the general's most confidential aide had to be there to pick up the pieces when the games were over. Pick it up, put it together, take it through the next morning at some obscure motel, and be goddamn sure no one found out what the games were or where the mess was. And by noon tomorrow the Chairman would announce his ramrod bearing, issue his orders, and the evening and mess would be forgotten.

The major had made these trips many times during the past few years - since the day after the general had assumed his position - but the trips always followed periods of intense activity at the Pentagon, or moments of national crisis, in which the general had shown his professional mettle. But never on such a night as this. Never on Christmas Eve, for Christ's

'No more than those in your Senate who would bomb the Ukraine. Such idiots are dismissed, as they should be.'

'Then I'm not sure I grasp the subtlety of your phrasing, Mr Premier.'

'I shall be clearer. Your Central Intelligence Agency has produced three names it believes may be involved with the death of General Blackburn. They are not, Mr President. You have my solemn word. They are *responsible* men, held in absolute control by their superiors. In point of fact, one man, Zhukovski, was hospitalized a week ago. Another, Krylovich, has been stationed at the Manchurian border for the past eleven months. And the respected Talenickov is, to all intents and purposes, retired. He is currently in Moscow.'

The President paused and stared at the Director of the CIA. 'Thank you for the clarification, Mr Premier, and for the accuracy of your information. I realize it wasn't easy for you to make this call. Soviet intelligence is to be commended.'

'As is your own. There are fewer secrets these days; some say that is good. I weighed the values, and had to reach you. We were not involved, Mr President.'

'I believe you. I wonder who it was.'

'I'm troubled, Mr President. I think we should both know the answer to that.'

2

'Dimitri Yurievich!' roared the buxom woman good-naturedly as she approached the bed, a breakfast tray in her hand. 'It's the first morning of your holiday. The snow is on the ground, the sun is melting it, and before you shake the vodka from your head, the forests will be green again!'

The man buried his face in the pillow, then rolled over and opened his eyes, blinking at the sheer whiteness of the room. Outside the large windows of the *dacha*, the branches of the trees were sagging under the weight of their blinding white blankets.

Yurievich smiled at his wife, his fingers touching the hairs of his beard, grown more grey than brown. 'I think I burned myself last night,' he said.

'You would have!' laughed the woman. 'Fortunately, my peasant instincts were inherited by our son. He sees fire and doesn't waste time analysing the components, but puts it out!'

'I remember him leaping at me.'

'He certainly did.' Yurievich's wife put the tray on the bed, pushing her husband's legs away to make room for herself. She sat down and reached for his forehead. 'You're warm, but you'll survive, my Cossack.'

'Give me a cigarette.'

'Not before fruit juice. You're a very important man; the cupboards are filled with cans of fruit juice. Our lieutenant says they're probably there to put out the cigarettes that burn your beard.'

'The mentality of soldiers will never improve. We scientists

understand that. The cans of juice are there to be mixed with vodka.' Dimitri Yurievich smiled again, not a little forlornly. 'cigarette, my love? I'll even let you light it.'

'You are impossible!' She picked up a pack of cigarettes from the bedside table, shook one out and put it between her husband's lips. 'Be careful not to breathe when I strike the match. We both explode, and I'll be buried in dishonour as the killer of the Soviet's most prominent nuclear physicist.'

'My work lives after me; let me be interred with smoke.' Yurievich inhaled as his wife held the match. 'Our son is faring well this morning?'

'He's fine. He was up early oiling the rifles. His guests will be here in an hour or so. The hunt begins around noon.'

'Oh, Lord, I forgot about that,' said Yurievich, pushing himself up on the pillow into a sitting position. 'Do I really have to go?'

'You and he are teamed together. Don't you remember telling everyone at dinner that father and son would bring home the prize game?'

Dimitri winced. 'It was my conscience speaking. All those years in the laboratories while he grew up somehow behind my back.'

His wife smiled. 'It will be good for you to get out in the cold air. Now finish your cigarette, eat your breakfast and get dressed.'

'You know something?' said Yurievich, taking his wife's hand just beginning to grasp it. 'This is a holiday. I can't remember the last one.'

'I'm not sure there ever was one. You work harder than any man I've known.'

Yurievich shrugged. 'It was good of the army to grant our son leave.'

'He requested it. He wanted to be with you.'

'That was good of him, too. I love him, but I hardly know him.'

'He's a fine officer, everyone says. You can be proud, my husband.'

'Oh I am, indeed, my wife. It's just that I don't know what to say to him. We have so little in common. The vodka made things easier last night.'

'You haven't seen each other in nearly two years.'

'I've had my work, everyone knows that.'

'You're a scientist.' His wife squeezed Dimitri's hand. 'But not today. Not for the next three weeks. No laboratories, no blackboards, no all-night sessions with eager young professors and

students who want to tell everybody they've worked with the great Yurievich.' She took the cigarette from between his lips and crushed it out. 'Now, eat your breakfast and get dressed. A winter hunt will do you a world of good.'

'My dear woman,' protested Dimitri, laughing, 'it will probably be the death of me. I haven't fired a rifle in over twenty years!'

Lieutenant Nikolai Yurievich trudged through the deep snow towards the old building that was once the *dacha's* stables. He turned and looked back at the huge three-storey main house. It glistened in the morning sunlight, a small alabaster palace set in an alabaster glen carved out of snow-laden forest. It was from another, far more graceful era that had disappeared, its like never to return again.

Moscow thought a great deal of his father. Everyone wanted to know about the great Yurievich, this brilliant, irascible man whose mere name frightened the leaders of the Western world. It was said that Dimitri Yurievich carried the formulae for a dozen nuclear tactical weapons in his head; that left alone in a munitions depot with an adjacent laboratory he could fashion a bomb that would destroy greater London, all of Washington and most of Peking.

That was the great Yurievich, a man immune from criticism or discipline, in spite of words and actions which were at times intemperate. Not in terms of his devotion to the state; that was never in question. Dimitri Yurievich was the fifth child of impoverished peasants from Kourov. Without the state he would be behind a mule on some aristocrat's land. No, he was a Communist to his boots, but like all brilliant men he had no patience with bureaucracies. He had been outspoken about interference and he had never been taken to task for it.

Which was why so many wanted to know him. On the assumption, Nikolai suspected, that even knowing the great Yurievich would somehow transfer a touch of his immunity to them.

The lieutenant knew that was the case today and it was an uncomfortable feeling. The 'guests' who were now on their way to his father's *dacha* had practically invited themselves. One was the commander of Nikolai's battalion in Vilnius, the other a man Nikolai did not even know. A friend of the commander's

father's son second. He would make his own way; it was very important to him that he do so. But he could not refuse this particular commander, for if there was any man in the Soviet army who deserved a touch of 'immunity', it was Colonel Janek Drigorin.

Drigorin had spoken out against the corruption that was rife in the Select Officer Corps. The resort clubs on the Black Sea paid for with misappropriated funds, the stockhouses filled with contraband, the women brought in on military aircraft against all regulations.

He was cut off by Moscow, sent to Vilnius to rot in mediocrity. Whereas Nikolai Yurievich was a twenty-one-year-old lieutenant exercising major responsibility in a minor post, Drigorin was a major military talent relegated to oblivion in a minor command. If such a man wished to spend a day with his father, Nikolai could not protest. And, after all, the colonel was a delightful person; he wondered what the other man was like.

Nikolai reached the stables and opened the large door that led to the corridor of stalls. The hinges had been oiled; the old entrance swung back without a sound. He walked down past the immaculately kept enclosures that once had held the best of breeds and tried to imagine what that Russia had been like. He could almost hear the whinnies of fiery-eyed stallions, the impatient scuffing of hooves, the snorting of hunters eager to break out for the fields.

That Russia must have been something. If you weren't behind a mule.

He came to the end of the long corridor, where there was another wide door. He opened it and walked out into the snow again. In the distance, something caught his eye; it seemed out of place. *They* seemed out of place.

Veering from the corner of a grain bin towards the edge of the forest, there were tracks in the snow. Footprints, perhaps. Yet the two servants assigned by Moscow to the *dacha* had not left the main house. And the gamekeepers were in their barracks down the road.

On the other hand, thought Nikolai, the warmth of the morning sun could have melted the rims of any impressions in the snow; and the blinding light played tricks on the eyes. They were no doubt the tracks of some foraging animal. The lieutenant smiled to himself at the thought of an animal from the forest looking for grain here, at this cared-for relic that was the grand *dacha's* stables. The

our leaving today. You'll stay the night, of course. Moscow is generous; there are roasts and fresh vegetables from Lenin-knows-where...

'And flasks of vodka, I trust.'

'Not flasks, Brunov. *Casks!* I see it in your eyes. We'll both be on holiday. You'll stay.'

'I'll stay,' said the man from Moscow.

The gunshots rang through the forest, vibrating in the ears. Now were they lost on the winter birds; screeches and the snapping of wings formed a rolling coda to the echoes. Nikolai could hear excited voices as well, but they were too far away to be understandable. He turned to his father.

'We should hear the whistle within sixty seconds if they hit something,' he said, his rifle angled down at the snow.

'It's an outrage!' replied Yurievich in mock anger. 'The gamekeepers swore to me - on the side, mind you - that all the game was in this section of the woods. Near the lake. There was *nothing* over there! It's why I insisted they go there.'

'You're an old scoundrel,' said the son, studying his father's weapon. 'Your safety's released. Why?'

'I thought I heard a rustle back there. I wanted to be ready.'

'With respect, my father, please put it back on. Wait until your trigger matches the sound you hear before you release it.'

'With respect, my soldier, then there'd be too much to do all at once.' Yurievich saw the concern in his son's eyes. 'On second thoughts, you're probably right. I'd fall and cause a detonation. That's something I know about.'

'Thank you,' said the lieutenant, suddenly turning. His father was right; there was something rustling behind them. A crack of a limb, the snap of a branch. He released the safety on his weapon.

'What is it?' asked Dimitri Yurievich, excitement in his eyes.

'Sh,' whispered Nikolai, peering into the shaggy corridors of white surrounding them.

He saw nothing. He snapped the safety into its locked position.

'You heard it, too, then?' asked Dimitri. 'It wasn't just this pair of fifty-five-year-old ears.'

'The snow's heavy,' suggested the son. 'Branches break under its weight. That's what we heard.'

'Well, one thing we *didn't* hear,' said Yurievich, 'was a whistle. They didn't hit a damn thing!'

Three more distant gunshots rang out.

'They've seen *something*,' said the lieutenant. 'Perhaps now we'll hear their whistle . . .'

Suddenly they heard it. A sound. But it was not a whistle. It was instead, a panicked, elongated scream, faint but distinct. Distinctly a terrible scream. It was followed by another, more hysterical, stretched out until the echoes enlarged it into waves of something horrible.

'My God, what happened?' Yurievich grabbed his son's arm.

'I don't . . .'

The reply was cut off by a third scream, searing and terrible. There were no words, only swallowed protests, shrieks of pain.

'Stay *here*!' yelled the lieutenant to his father. 'I'll go to them.'

'I'll follow,' said Yurievich. 'Go quickly, but be careful!'

Nikolai raced through the snow towards the source of the screams. They filled the woods now, less shrill, but more painful for the loss of power. The soldier used his rifle to crash his path through the heavy branches, bending, breaking, kicking up spray of snow. His legs ached, the cold air swelled in his lungs, his sigh was obscured by tears of fatigue.

He heard the roars first, and then he saw what he most feared: what no hunter ever wanted to see.

An enormous, wild black bear, his terrifying face a mass of blood, was wreaking his vengeance on those who'd caused his wounds, clawing, ripping, slashing at his enemy.

Nikolai raised his rifle and fired until there were no more shells in the chamber.

The giant bear fell. The soldier raced to the two men; he lost what breath he had as he looked at them.

The man from Moscow was dead, his throat torn, his bloodied head barely attached to his body. Drigorin was only just alive, and if he did not die in seconds, Nikolai knew he would reload his weapon and finish what the animal had not done. The colonel had no face; it was not there. In its place a sight that burned itself into the soldier's mind.

How? How could it have happened?

And then the lieutenant's eyes strayed to Drigorin's and the shock was beyond anything he could imagine.

It was half severed from his elbow, the method of surgery. Heavy calibre bullets.

The colonel's firing arm had been shot c

Nikolai ran to Brunov's corpse; he reached down and rolled over.

Brunov's arm was intact, but his left hand had been blown apart, only the gnarled, bloody outline of a palm left, the finger strips of bone. His *left hand*. Nikolai Yurievich remembered the morning; the coffee and fruit juice and vodka and cigarettes.

The man from Moscow was left-handed.

Brunov and Drigorin had been rendered defenceless by someone with a gun, someone who knew what was in their path.

Nikolai stood up cautiously, the soldier in him primed, seeking an unseen enemy. And this was an enemy he wanted to find and kill with all his heart. His mind raced back to the footprints he had seen behind the stables. They were not those of a scavenging animal – though an animal's they were – they were the tracks of a killer so obscene there was nothing in the *Lubyanka* he did not deserve.

Who was it? Above all, *why*?

The lieutenant saw a flash of light. Sunlight off a weapon.

He made a move to his right, then abruptly spun to his left and lunged to the ground, rolling behind the trunk of an oak tree. He removed the empty magazine from his weapon, replacing it with a fresh one. He squinted his eyes up at the source of the light. It came from high in a pine tree.

A figure was straddling two limbs fifty feet above the ground, with a telescopic sight in his hands. The killer wore a white ow parka with a white fur hood, his face obscured behind wide black sunglasses.

Nikolai thought he would vomit in rage and revulsion. The man was smiling, and the lieutenant knew he was smiling down at him.

Furiously, he raised his rifle. An explosion of snow blinded him accompanied by the loud report of a high-powered rifle. A second gunshot followed; the bullet thumped into the wood above his head. He pulled back into the protection of the trunk.

Another gunshot, this one in the near distance, not from the killer in the pine tree.

'Nikolai!'

His mind burst. There was nothing left but rage. The voice that screamed his name was his father's.

'Nikolai!'

Another shot. The soldier sprang up from the ground, firing his rifle into the tree and raced across the snow.

An icelike incision was made in his chest. He heard nothing and felt nothing until he knew his face was cold.

'Horrible,' he whispered. 'That men should die like this is horrible. At least, Yurievich was spared - not his life, but such an end as this.'

Across the room, seated around another table, were two men.

leashed by such displays of impatience. The Premier was a man whose mind raced faster than anyone's in that room, but his deliberations were nevertheless slow, the complexities considered. He was a survivor in a world where only the most astute - and subtle - survived.

Fear was a weapon he used with extraordinary skill. He stood up, pushing the photographs away in disgust, and strode back to the conference table.

'Then he wasn't informed,' said the second man curtly. 'Speak in id in G o card!'

'He might if it was the weapon he was most familiar with

We've found a pattern.' The VKR man turned to the middle-aged woman, whose face was chiselled granite. 'Explain, if you will Comrade Director.'

The woman opened her file folder and scanned the top page before speaking. She turned to the second page and addressed the Premier, her eyes avoiding the diplomat. 'As you know there were two assassins, presumably both male. One had to be a marksman of extreme skill and co-ordination, the other someone who undoubtedly possessed the same qualifications, but who was also an expert in electronic surveillance. There was evidence in the stables - bracket scrapings, suction imprints, footprints indicating unobstructed vantage points - that lead us to believe all conversations in the *dacha* were intercepted.'

'You describe CIA expertise, comrade,' interrupted the Premier.

'Or Consular Operations, sir,' replied the woman. 'It's important to bear that in mind.'

'Oh, yes,' agreed the Premier. 'The State Department's small band of "negotiators".'

'Why not the Chinese Tao-pans?' offered the diplomat earnestly. 'They're among the most effective killers on earth. The Chinese had more to fear from Yurievich than anyone else.'

'Physiognomy rules them out,' countered the man from VKR.

" was caught, even after cyanide, Peking knows it would be
oyed.'

back to this pattern you've found,' interrupted the Premier.

The woman continued. 'We fed everything through KGB

" s, concentrating on American intelligence personnel we know we have penetrated Russia, who speak the language fluently, and are known killers. We have arrived at four names. Here they are, Mr Premier. Three from the Central Intelligence Agency, one from the Department of State's Consular Operations.' She handed the page to the VKR man, who in turn rose and gave it to the Premier.

He looked at the names.

Scofield, Brandon Alan. State Department, Consular Operations. Known to have been responsible for assassinations in Prague, Athens, Paris, Munich. Suspected of having operated in Moscow itself. Involved in over twenty defections.

Randolph, David. Central Intelligence Agency. Cover is Import Traffic Manager, Dynamax Corporation, West Berlin.

Branch. All phases of sabotage. Known to have been instrumental in hydro-electrical explosions in Kazan and Tagil.

Saltzman, George Robert. Central Intelligence Agency. Operated as pouch courier and assassin in Vientiane under AII cover for six years. Oriental expert. Currently - since five weeks ago - in the Tashkent sector. Cover: Australian immigrant sales manager: Perth Radar Corporation.

Bergstrom, Edward. Central Intelligence Agency . . .

'Mr Premier,' interrupted the man from VKR. 'My associate meant to explain that the names are in order of priority. In our opinion, the entrapment and execution of Dimitri Yurievich bear all the earmarks of the first man on that list.'

'This is Scofield?'

'Yes, Mr Premier. He disappeared a month ago in Marseilles. He's done more damage, compromised more operations, than any agent the United States has fielded since the war.'

'Really?'

'Yes, sir.' The VKR man paused, then spoke hesitantly, as if he did not want to go on, but knew he must. 'His wife was killed ten years ago. In East Berlin. He's been a maniac ever since.'

'East Berlin?'

'It was a trap. KGB.'

The telephone rang on the Premier's desk; he crossed rapidly and picked it up.

It was the President of the United States. The interpreters were on the line; they went to work.

'We grieve the death - the terrible murder - of a very great man. . . . the horror that befell his friends.'

. for your sympathies, but I can't help but wonder if perhaps you are not somewhat relieved that the Soviet Union has lost its foremost nuclear physicist.'

'I am not, sir. His brilliance transcended our borders and differences. He was a man for all peoples.'

'Yet he chose to be a part of *one* people, did he not? I tell you frankly, my concern does not transcend our differences. Rather, it forces me to look to my flanks.'

'Then, if you'll forgive me, Mr Premier, I'm looking for phantoms.'

'Perhaps we've found them, Mr President. We have evidence that is extremely disturbing to me. So much so that I have . . .'

'Forgive me once again,' interrupted the President of the United States. 'Your evidence has prompted my calling you, in spite of my natural reluctance to do so. The KGB has made great error. Four errors, to be precise.'

'Four . . .'

'Yes, Mr Premier. Specifically the names Scofield, Randolph Saltzman and Bergstrom. None was involved, Mr Premier.'

'You astonish me, Mr President.'

'No more than you astonished me the other week. There are fewer secrets these days, remember?'

'Words are inexpensive; the evidence is strong.'

'Then it's been so calculated. Let me clarify. Two of the three men from Central Intelligence are no longer in sanction. Randolph and Bergstrom are currently at their desks in Washington. Mr Saltzman was hospitalized in Tashkent; the diagnosis is cancer. The President paused.

'That leaves one name, doesn't it?' said the Premier. 'You mean the man from the infamous Consular Operations. So bland in diplomatic circles, but infamous to us.'

'This is the most painful aspect of my clarification. It's inconceivable that Mr Scofield could have been involved. More so than any of the others, frankly. I tell you this because it no longer matters.'

'Words cost little . . .'

'Mr Premier, I must be explicit. For the past several years, a covert, in-depth dossier has been maintained on Dr Yurievich. Information added almost daily, certainly every month. In certain judgements, it was time to reach Dimitri Yurievich with viable options.'

'What?'

'Yes, Mr Premier. Defection. The two men who travelled to the dacha to make contact with Mr Yurievich did so in our interests. Their source-control was Scofield. It was his operation.'

The Premier of Soviet Russia stared across the room at the pile of photographs on the table. He spoke softly. 'Thank you for your frankness.'

'Look to other flanks.'

'I shall.'

'We both must.'

The late afternoon sun was a fireball, its rays bouncing off the waters of the canal in blinding oscillation. The crowds walking west on Amsterdam's Kalverstraat squinted as they hurried along the pavement, grateful for the February sun and gusts of wind that came off the myriad waterways that stemmed from the Amstel River. Too often February brought the mists and rain, dampness everywhere; it was not the case today and the citizens of the North Sea's most vital port city seemed exhilarated by the clear, biting air warmed from above.

One man, however, was not exhilarated. Neither was he a citizen nor on the streets. His name was Brandon Alan Scofield, attaché-at-large, Consular Operations, United States Department of State. He stood at a window four storeys above the canal and the Kalverstraat, peering through binoculars down at the crowd, specifically at the area of the pavement where a glass telephone booth reflected the harsh flashes of sunlight. The light made him squint, but there was no gratitude felt, no energy evident on Scofield's pallid face, a face whose sharp features were drawn and taut beneath a vaguely combed cover of light brown hair, fringed at the edge with strands of grey.

He kept refocusing the binoculars, cursing the light and the swift movements below. His eyes were tired, the hollows beneath dark and stretched, the results of too little sleep for many reasons Scofield did not care to think about. There were many reasons and he was a professional; his concentration could

There were two other men in the room. A balding technician sat at a table with a dismantled telephone, wires connecting it to a tape machine, the receiver off the hook. Somewhere under the streets a telephone complex, arrangements had been made; they were the only co-operation that would be given by the Amsterdam police. The debt called in by the attaché-at-large from the American State Department. The third person in the room was younger than the other two, in his early thirties and with no lack of energy on his face, no exhaustion in his eyes. If his features were taut, it was the tautness of enthrallment; he was a young man eager for the kill. His weapon was a fast-film motion picture camera mounted on a tripod with a telescopic lens attached. He would have preferred a different weapon.

Down in the street, a figure appeared in the tinted circles of Scofield's binoculars. The figure hesitated by the telephone booth and in that brief moment was jostled by the crowds off to the side of the pavement, in front of the flashing glass, blocking the glass with his body, a target surrounded by a halo of sunlight. It would be more comfortable for everyone concerned if the target could be zeroed where he was standing now. A high-powered rifle calibrated for seventy yards could do it; the man in the window could squeeze the trigger. He had done so often before. But comfort was not the issue. A lesson had to be taught, another lesson learned. Such instruction depended on the confluence of vital factors: those doing the teaching and those being taught had to understand their respective roles. Otherwise an execution was meaningless.

The figure below was an elderly man, in his middle to late sixties. He was dressed in rumpled clothing, a thick overcoat pulled around his neck to ward off the chill, a battered hat pulled down over his forehead. There was a stubble of a beard on his frightened face; he was a man-on-the-run and for the American watching him through the binoculars, there was nothing so terrible, or haunting, as an old man-on-the-run. Except, perhaps, an old woman. He had seen both. Far more often than he cared to think about.

Scofield glanced at his watch. 'Go ahead,' he said to the technician at the table. Then he turned to the younger man who stood beside him. 'You ready?'

'Yes,' was the curt reply. 'I've got the son of a bitch centered. Washington was right; you proved it.'

'I'm not sure what I've proved yet. I wish I was. When he's in the booth, get his lips.'

'Right.'

The technician dialled the pre-arranged numbers and punched the buttons of the tape machine. He rose quickly from his chair and handed Scofield a semi-circular headset with a mouthpiece and single earphone. 'It's ringing,' he said.

'I know. He's staring through the glass. He's not sure he wants to hear it. That bothers me.'

'Move, you son of a bitch!' said the young man with the camera.

'He will,' said the older, light-haired Scofield, the binoculars and headset held firmly in his hands. 'He's frightened. Each half-second is a long time for him and I don't know why . . . There he goes; he's opening the door. Everybody quiet.' Scofield continued to stare through the binoculars, listened, and then spoke quietly into the mouthpiece. '*Dobri dyen, priyatye! . . .*'

The conversation, spoken entirely in Russian, lasted for eighteen seconds.

'*Da svidaniya,*' said Scofield, adding '*zafra nochyyu. Na mostye.*' He continued to hold the headset to his ear and watched the frightened man below. The target disappeared into the crowds; the camera's motor stopped, and the attaché-at-large put down the binoculars, handing the headset to the technician. 'Were you able to get it all?' he asked.

'Clear enough for a voice print,' said the balding operator, checking his dials.

'You?' Scofield turned to the young man by the camera.

'If I understood the language better, even I could read his lips.'

'Good. Others will; they'll understand it very well.' Scofield reached into his pocket, took out a small leather notebook, and began writing. 'I want you to take the tape and the film to the embassy. Get the film developed right away and have duplicates made of both. I want miniatures; here are the specifications.'

'Sorry, Bray,' said the technician, glancing at Scofield as he wound a coil of telephone wire. 'I'm not allowed within five blocks of the territory, you know that.'

'I'm talking to Harry,' replied Scofield, angling his head towards the younger man. He tore out the page from his notebook. 'When the reductions are made, have them inserted in a single watertight flatcase. I want it coated, good enough for a week in the water.'

'Bray,' said the young man, taking the page of paper, 'I'll pick up about every third word you said on the phone.'

'You're improving,' interrupted Scofield, walking back to the window and the binoculars. 'When you get to every other one we'll recommend an upgrade.'

'That man wanted to meet tonight,' continued Harry. 'You turned him down.'

'That's right,' said Scofield, raising the binoculars to his eyes, focusing out the window.

'Our instructions were to take him as soon as we could. The cipher plain text was clear about that. No time lost.'

'Time's relative, isn't it? When the old man heard the teletyping ring, every second was an agonizing minute for him. For us, an hour can be a day. In Washington, for Christ's sake, a day is normally measured by a calendar year.'

'That's no answer,' pressed Harry, looking at the river. 'We can get this stuff reduced and packed in forty-five minutes. We can make the contact tonight. Why don't we?'

'The weather's rotten,' said Scofield, the binoculars at his eyes.

'The weather's perfect. Not a cloud in the sky.'

'That's what I mean. It's rotten. A clear night means a lot of people strolling around the canal; in bad weather, they don't. Tomorrow's forecast is for rain.'

'That doesn't make sense. In ten seconds we block a bridge, we're over the side and dead in the water.'

'Tell that clown to shut up, Harry,' shouted the technician at the ble.

'You heard the man,' said Scofield, leaning on the eaves of the buildings outside. 'You just lost the upgrade. Your outrageous statement that we intend to commit bodily harm to our friends in the Company.'

The younger man grimaced. The rebuke was deserved. 'Wrong. It still doesn't make sense. The cipher was a priority alert; we should take him tonight.'

Scofield lowered the binoculars and looked at Harry. 'I'll tell you what *does* make sense,' he said quietly, with an edge to his voice. 'Somewhat more than those silly goddamned placards someone found on the back of a cereal box. That man down there was terrified. He hasn't slept in days. He's strung out to the breaking point, and I want to know why.'

'There could be a dozen reasons,' countered the younger man. 'He's old. Inexperienced. Maybe he thinks we're on to him, that he's about to be caught. What difference does it make?'

'A man's life, that's all.'

'Come on, Bray, not from you. He's Soviet poison; a double agent.'

'I want to be sure.'

'And I want to get out of here,' broke in the technician, handing Seefield a reel of tape and picking up his machine. 'Tell the clown we never met.'

'Thanks, Mr No-name, I owe you.'

The CIA man left, nodding at Bray, avoiding any contact with his associate.

'There was no one here but us chickens, Harry,' said Seefield as the door was shut. 'You do understand that.'

'He's a nasty bastard.'

'Who could tap the White House toilets, if he hasn't already,' said Bray, tossing the reel of tape to the younger man. 'Get our infected indictments over to the embassy. Take out the film before the camera here.'

Harry would not be put off, he caught the reel of tape, but made no move towards the camera. 'I'm in this, too. That cipher applied to us as well as to you. I want to have answers in case I'm asked questions, in case something happens between tonight and tomorrow.'

'Nothing will happen, nothing will happen. I told you. I want to see you.'

'What more do you need?' The target thinks he just made a mistake, that's all. 'You engineered it. You proved it.'

Seefield studied the younger man for a moment, then turned away and walked back to the window. 'You know something, Harry? All the training you get, all the words you hear, all the questions you go through, never take the place of the first rule. Teach yourself to look on a faraway point above the skyline. Teach yourself to think like the enemy thinks. Not how you'd like him to think, but

thing. He was somewhere in a cloud of vapour, numbed, all sense dormant. He wondered what he would say to the man who had flown thirty-five hundred miles to see him.

He did not care.

He heard footsteps on the stairs beyond the door. The maid had obviously been dismissed by a man who knew his way in this house. The door opened and the man from State walked in.

Scofield knew him. He was from Planning and Development, a strategist for covert operations. He was around Bray's age, but thinner, a bit shorter, and given to old-school-tie exuberance which he did not feel but which he hoped concealed his ambition. It did not.

'Bray, how *are* you, old buddy?' he said in a half-shout, extending an exuberant hand for a more exuberant grip. 'My God, it must be damn near two years! Have I got a couple of stories to tell *you*!'

'Really?'

'*Have I!*' An exuberant statement, no question implied. 'I went up to Cambridge for my twentieth and naturally ran into friends of yours right and left. Well, old buddy, I got pissed and couldn't remember what lies I told *who* about you! Christ Almighty, I had you an import analyst in Malaya, a language expert in New Guinea, an under-secretary in Canberra. It was hysterical. I mean, I couldn't *remember* I was so pissed.'

'Why would anyone ask about me, Charlie?'

'Well, they knew we were both at State; we were friends, everybody knew that.'

'Cut it out. We were never friends. I suspect you dislike me almost as much as I dislike you. And I've never seen you drunk in your life.'

The man from State stood motionless; the exuberant smile slowly disappeared from his lips. 'You want to play it rough?'

'I want to play it as it is.'

'What happened?'

'Where? When? At Harvard?'

'You know what I'm talking about. The other night. What happened the other night?'

'You tell me. You set it in motion, you spun the first wheels.'

'We uncovered a dangerous security leak. A pattern of active espionage going back years that reduced the effectiveness of space surveillance to the point where we now know it's been a mockery.'

We wanted it confirmed; you confirmed it. You knew what had to be done and you walked away.'

'I walked away,' agreed Scofield.

'And when confronted with the fact by an associate, you did bodily injury to him. To your *own man*!'

'I certainly did. If I were you I'd get rid of him. Transfer him to Chile; you can't fuck up a hell of a lot more down there.'

'What?'

'No, I'm sorry to say. I thought about it, but I've got a little acidity in my stomach. Of course, if I'd known they were sending you, I might have fought the good fight and tried. For old time's sake, naturally.'

'If you're not drunk, you're off your trolley.'

'The track veered; those wheels you spun couldn't take the curve.'

'Cut the horseshit!'

'What a dated phrase, Charlie. These days we say bullshit, although I prefer lizardshit . . .'

'That's enough! Your action - or should I say *inaction* - compromised a vital aspect of counter-espionage.'

'Now, *you* cut the horseshit!' roared Bray, taking an ominous step towards the man from State. 'I've heard all I want to hear from you! I didn't compromise anything. *You* did! You and the rest of those bastards back there. You found an ersatz leak in your Goddamned sieve and so you had to plug it up with a corpse. Then you could go to the Forty Committee and tell *those* bastards how efficient you were!'

'What are you talking about?'

'The old man *was* a defector. He was reached, but he *was* a defector.'

'What do you mean "reached"? ' asked the man from State defensively.

'I'm not sure; I wish I did. Somewhere in that Four-Zero dossier . . .'

And I was his *listok*.'

'What's that mean?'

'For Christ's sake, learn the language. You're supposed to be an expert.'

'Don't pull that language crap on me, I *am* an expert. There's no evidence to support an extortion theory, no family reported or referred to by the target at any time. He was a dedicated agent for Soviet intelligence.'

'Evidence? Oh, come on, Charlie, even you know better than that. If he was good enough to pull off a defection, he was smart enough to bury what had to be buried. My guess is that the kill was timing, and the timing blew up. His secret - or secrets - were found out. He was reached; it's all through his dossier. He lived abnormally, even for an abnormal existence.'

'We rejected that approach,' said the man from State emphatically. 'He was an eccentric.'

Scofield stopped and stared. 'You rejected? . . . An eccentric? Goddamn you, you *did* know. You could have *used* that, fed him anything you liked. But no, you wanted a quick solution so the men upstairs would see how good you were. You could have *used* him, not killed him! But you didn't know how, so you kept quiet and called out the hangmen.'

'That's preposterous. There's no way you could prove he'd been reached.'

'Prove it? I don't have to prove it, I know it.'

'How?'

'I saw it in his eyes, you son of a bitch.'

The man from State paused, then spoke softly. 'You're tired, Bray. You need a rest.'

'With a pension?' asked Scofield. 'Or with a casket?'

laughed. The objective was to mount a brief but strong campaign against Zionist accusations, to show people in the West that not all Jews thought alike in Soviet Russia.

The Jewish writer had become something of a minor cause in the American press – the New York press, to be specific. He had been among those who had spoken to a visiting senator in search of votes eight thousand miles away from a constituency. But regardless, notwithstanding, he simply was not a good writer, and, in fact, something of an embarrassment to his co-religionists.

Not only was the writer the wrong choice for such an exercise but for reasons intrinsic to another operation it was imperative that he be permitted to leave Russia. He was a blind trade-off for the senator in New York. The senator had been led to believe it was his acquaintanceship with an attaché at the consulate that had caused Soviet emigration to issue a visa; the senator would make capital out of the incident and a small hook would exist where one had not existed before. Enough hooks and an awkward relationship would suddenly exist between the senator and 'acquaintance' within the Soviet power structure; it could be useful. The Jew had to leave Moscow tonight. In three days the senator had scheduled a welcoming news conference at Kennedy Airport.

But the young aggressive thinkers at the VKR were adamant. The writer would be detained, brought to the *Lubyanka* – where the VKR had its headquarters replete with laboratories – and the process of transformation would commence. No one outside the VKR was to be told of the operation; success depended upon sudden disappearance, total secrecy. Chemicals would have been administered until the subject was ready for a different sort of news conference. One in which he revealed that Israeli terrorists had threatened him with reprisals against relatives in Tel Aviv. If he did not follow their instructions and cry publicly to be able to leave Russia.

The scheme was preposterous and Vasili had said as much to his contact at the VKR, but was told confidentially that not even the extraordinary Taleniev could interfere with Group Nine. *Vodennaya Kontra Rozvedka*. And what in the name of all the discredited Tzars was Group Nine?

It was the *new* Group Nine, his friend had explained. It was the successor to the infamous Section Nine, KGB, *Smert Shpionam*. That division of Soviet intelligence devoted exclusively to the breaking of men's minds and wills through extortion, torture and

uch an unimportant thing, a street-corner protest on the Kur-
firstendamm. A child leading other children, mouthing words they
arely understood, espousing commitments they were ill-prepared
to accept. An unimportant ritual. Insignificant.

But not to the animals of the American Army of Occupation,
52 Branch, who set other animals upon her.

Her body was sent back in a hearse, her face bruised almost
eyond recognition, the rest of her clawed to the point where the
esh was torn, the blood splotches of dried red dust. And the
ctors had confirmed the worst. She had been repeatedly raped
nd sodomized, her pelvic area pounded by abuse.

Attached to the body – the note held in place by a nail driven
nto her arm – were the words: *Up your commie ass. Just like hers.*

Animals!

American animals who bought their way to victory without a
shell having fallen on their soil, whose might was measured by
unfettered industry that made enormous profits from the carnage
of foreign lands, whose soldiers peddled cans of food to hungry
children to gratify other appetites. All armies had animals, but the
Americans were most offensive; they proclaimed such innocent
righteousness. Forever the proverb was right: Beware the sancti-
monious, beneath there is boiling dirt.

Taleniekov had returned to Moscow, the memory of the girl's
death burned into his mind. Whatever he had been, he
became something else. According to many, he became the best
there was, and by his own lights none could possibly wish to be
better than he did. With all its faults – and there were many – the
Marxist eventuality was the true democratic future. He had seen
the enemy and he was filth. But that enemy had resources beyond
imagination, wealth beyond belief; so it was necessary to be better
than he was in things that could not be purchased. One had to
learn to think as he did. Then out-think him. Vasili had understood
this; he became the master of strategy and counter-strategy, the
springer of unexpected traps, the deliverer of unanticipated shock-
death in the morning sunlight on a crowded street corner.

Death in the Unter den Linden at five o'clock in the afternoon.
At that hour when the traffic was at its maximum.

He had brought that about, too. He had avenged the murder of a
laughing child-woman years later, when as the director of KGB
operations, East Berlin, he had drawn the wife of an American
killer across the checkpoint. She had been run down cleanly,

professionally, with a minimum of conscious pain; it was a far more merciful death than that delivered by animals four years earlier.

1940. 1940. 1940. 1940. 1940. 1940. 1940. 1940. 1940. 1940.

A brother

Where was the hated Scofield these days? wondered Vasili. It was close to a quarter of a century for him, too. They each had served their causes well, that much could be said for both of them. Scofield was more fortunate; things were less complicated in Washington, one's enemies within more defined. The despised Scofield did not have to put up with such amateurish maniacs as Group Nine, VKR. The American State Department had its share of madmen, but sterner controls were exercised, Vasili had to admit that. In a few years, if Scofield survived in Europe, he would retire to some remote place and grow chickens or oranges or drink himself into oblivion. He did not have to be concerned about surviving in Washington, just in Europe.

Taleniekov had to worry about surviving in Moscow.

Things . . . things had changed in a quarter of a century. And he had changed, tonight was an example, but not the first. He had overtly thwarted the objectives of a fellow intelligence unit. He would not have done so five years ago - perhaps even two years ago. He would have confronted the strategists of that unit, stating that he understood the necessity for their secrecy, but having learned of their plans, strenuously objected on professional grounds. He was an expert, and in his expert judgement, the operation was not only miscalculated but less vital than another with which it interfered.

He did not take such action these days. He had not done so during the past two years as director of the South-west Section. He

caused minor furors back in Moscow, but those minor furors became major grievances and he was recalled to the Kremlin and a desk were remote, dealing with progressive abstract books into an American politician.

Talenskov had fallen, he knew that. It was only a question of time. How much time had he left? Would he be given a *travelling* north of Gorky and be told to grow his crop and keep his own council? Or would the revolution interfere with that course of action too? Would they claim the 'extraordinary Talenskov' was indeed, too dangerous?

As he made his way along the street, Vasil felt a tired, weary even the loathing he felt for the American killer who had murdered his brother was muted in the twilight of his feelings. He had no bitterness left.

The sudden snow storm reached blizzard proportions, the wind gale force, causing eruptions of huge white spray through the expanse of Red Square. Lenin's Tomb would be covered by morning. Talenskov let the freezing particles massage his face as he trudged against the wind towards his flat. KGB had been considered; his rooms were ten minutes from here (5 min Dostoevsky Square, three blocks away from the Kremlin). It was either consideration, or something less benevolent but infinitely more practical: his flat was ten minutes from the centres of crisis, five minutes in a fast automobile.

He walked into the entrance way of his building, stamping his feet as he pulled the heavy door shut, cutting off the harsh sound of the wind. As he always did, he checked his mail slot in the wall and as always, there was nothing. It was a futile ritual that had become a meaningless habit for so many years, in so many multistore, in so many different buildings.

The only personal mail he ever received was in foreign countries - under strange names - when he was in deep cover. And then the correspondence was in code and cipher, its meaning in no way related to the words on paper. Yet sometimes those words were very nice, often warm and friendly, and he would pretend for a few minutes that they were the real words, their meaning real. But only for a few minutes; it did no good to pretend. Unless one was analysing an enemy.

He started up the narrow staircase, annoyed by the dim light of the low-wattage bulbs. He was quite sure the planners in Moscow's *Elektricheskaya* did not live in such buildings.

Then he heard the creak. It was not the result of structural stress; it had nothing to do with the sub-freezing cold or the wind outside. It was the sound of a human being shifting his weight on a

'I didn't do anything wrong, sir. I swear it!' The young man whisper cracked in fear.

'Who are you?'

'Andrei Danilovich, sir. I live in the Cheryomushki.'

'You're a long way from home,' said Vasili, estimating that the housing development referred to by the boy was nearly forty-five minutes south of Red Square. 'The weather's terrible and someone your age could be picked up by the *militsiyaner*.'

'I had to come here, sir,' answered the young man quickly. 'The old man's been shot; he's hurt very badly. I think he's going to die. I want to give this to you.' The boy opened his left hand; in it was a brass emblem. An army insignia denoting the rank of general. The design had not been used in over thirty years. 'The old man said I should say the name Krupsky, Aleksie Krupsky. He made me say it several times so I wouldn't forget it. It's not the name he used to live down at the Cheryomushki, but it's the one he said to give you. He said I must bring you to him. He's dying, sir!'

At the sound of the name, Taleniekov's mind raced back to a long time. Aleksie Krupsky! It was a name he had not heard in years. The name few people in Moscow wanted to hear. Krupsky was one of the greatest teachers in the KGB, a man of infinite talent for killing and survival – as well he might be. He was the last of the notorious *istrebiteli*, that highly specialized group of *exterminators* that had been an élite outcrop of the old NKVD, its roots in the baroque days of the OGPU.

But Aleksie Krupsky had disappeared – as so many had disappeared – at least a dozen years ago. There had been rumours linking him to the deaths of Beria and Zhukov, some even mentioning Stalin himself. Once in a fit of rage – or fear – Khrushchov had stood up in the Praesidium and called Krupsky and his associates a band of maniacal killers. That was not true; there was never any mania in the work of the *istrebiteli*, it was too methodical. Regardless, suddenly one day Aleksie Krupsky was no longer seen at the *Lubyanka*.

Yet there were other rumours. Those that spoke of documents prepared by Krupsky, hidden in some remote place, that were guarantees to a personal old age. It was said these documents incriminated various leaders of the Kremlin in scores of killing reported, unreported and disguised. So it was presumed that Aleksie Krupsky was living out his life somewhere north

'No one told me. It's ridiculous.'
 'No one tells you much any more, do they, my old student?'
 'I don't fool myself, old friend. I've given. I don't know how much more I have to give. Grasnov is not far distant, perhaps.'
 'If it is permitted,' interrupted Krupsky.
 'I think it will be.'
 'No matter . . . Last month, the scientist, Yurievich. He was murdered while on holiday up in a Provasoto *dacha*, along with Colonel Drigorin and the man, Brunov, from Industrial Planning.
 'I heard about it,' said Taleniekov. 'I gather it was horrible.'
 'Did you read the report?'
 'What report?'
 'The one compiled by VKR . . .'
 'Madmen and fools,' interjected Taleniekov softly.
 'Not always,' corrected Krupsky. 'In this case they have specific facts, accurate as far as they go.'
 'What are these supposedly accurate facts?'
 Krupsky, breathing with difficulty, swallowed and continued. 'Shell casings, seven millimetre, American. Bore markings from a Browning Magnum, grade four.'
 'A brutal gun,' said Taleniekov, nodding. 'Very reliable. And the last weapon that would be used by someone sent from Washington.'
 'Also a fact that could be overlooked in the barrage of charges and countercharges.' The old man paused, staring at his long-ago student. 'The gun used to kill General Blackburn was a Graz-Burya.'
 Vasili raised his eyebrows. 'A prized weapon when obtainable.' He paused and added quietly. 'I favour mine.'
 'Exactly. As the Magnum, grade four, is a favoured weapon of another.'
 Taleniekov stiffened. 'Oh?'
 'Yes, Vasili. VKR came up with several names it thinks could be responsible for Yurievich's death. The leading contender was a man you despise: "Beowulf Agate".'
 Taleniekov spoke in a monotone. 'Brandon Scofield, Consular Operations. Code name, Prague - Beowulf Agate.'
 'Yes.'
 'Was he?'
 'No.' The old man struggled to raise his head on the pillow. 'No more than you were involved with Blackburn's death. Don't

'Assassinations? Purchase and murder? You must be more specific.'

Krupsky's breath came shorter as he fell back on the pillow. But strangely, his voice grew firmer. 'There is no time - I do not have the time. My source is the most reliable in Moscow - in all the Soviet.'

'Forgive me, dear Aleksie, you were the best, but you do not exist any more. Everyone knows that.'

'You must reach Beowulf Agate,' said the old *Istrebitel*, although Vasili had not spoken. 'You and he must find them. Stop them. Before one of us is taken, the other's destruction guaranteed. You and the man Scofield. You are the best now, and the best are needed.'

Taleniekov looked impassively at the dying Krupsky. 'That is something no one can ask me to do. If Beowulf Agate were in my vision, I would kill him. As he would kill me, if he were capable.'

'You are *insignificant*!' The old man's breath was exhausted; he had to breathe slowly, in desperation, to get the air back in his lungs. 'You have no time for yourselves, can't you understand that? They are in our clandestine services, in the most powerful circles of both governments. They used the two of you once; they will use you again, and *again*. They use only the best and they will kill only the best! You are their diversions, men and men like you!'

'Where is the proof?'

'In the pattern,' whispered Krupsky. 'I've studied it. I know it well.'

'What pattern?'

The Graz-Burya shells in New York; the seven millimetre casings of a Browning Magnum in Provasoto. Within hours Moscow and Washington were at each other's throats. This is the way of the Matarese. It never kills without leaving evidence - often the killers themselves - but it is never the right evidence, never the true killers.'

'Men have been caught who pulled triggers, Aleksie.'

'For the wrong reasons, Vasili Vasilievich. Those reasons provided by the Matarese. . . Now, it takes us to the edge of chaos and overthrow.'

'But *why*?'

Krupsky turned his head, his eyes in focus, pleading. 'I don't know. The pattern is there but not the *reasons* for it. That is what frightens me. One must go back to understand. The roots of the

Matarese are in Corsica. The madman of Corsica; it started with him. The Corsican fever. Guillaume de Matarese. He was the high priest.'

'When?' asked Talenickov. 'How long ago?'

'During the early years of the century. Before the first decade was over . . . Guillaume de Matarese and his council. The high priest and his ministers. They've come back. They must be stopped. You and the man, Scofield! Their last ploy was with you!'

'Who are they?' asked Vasili, disregarding the statement. 'Where are they?'

'No one knows.' The old man's voice was failing now. He was failing. 'The Corsican fever. It spreads.'

'Aleksie, listen to me,' said Talenickov, disturbed by a possibility that could not be overlooked: the fantasies of a dying man could not be taken seriously. 'Who is this reliable source of yours? Who is the man so knowledgeable in Moscow – in all the Soviet Union? How did you get the information you've given me? About the killing of Blackburn, the VKR report on Yurievich? Above all this unknown man who speaks of timetables?'

Through the personal haze of his approaching death, Krupsky understood. A faint smile appeared on his thin, pale lips. 'Every few days,' he said, struggling to be heard, 'a driver comes to see me. . . . take me for a ride in the countryside. Sometimes to meet secretly with another. It's the State's kindness to a pensioned old man whose name was appropriated. I am kept informed.'

'I don't understand, Aleksie.'

'The Premier of Soviet Russia is my son.'

Talenickov felt a wave of cold rush through him. The revelation explained so much. The Premier had survived and won over so many others; he had emerged the victor as the barriers to power had been removed. One by one – selectively. Krupsky had to be taken seriously; the old *istrebitel* had possessed the information – the ammunition – to eliminate all who stood in the way of his son's march to premiership of Soviet Russia.

'Would he see me?'

'Never. At the first mention of the Matarese, he would have you shot. Try to understand, he would have no choice. But he knows I am right. He agrees, but will never acknowledge it; he cannot afford to. He simply wonders whether it is he or the American President who will be in the gunsight.'

'I understand.'

'Leave me now,' said the dying Krupsky. 'Do what you must'—
O, Taleniev. I have no more breath. Reach Beowulf Agate,
and the Matarese. It must be stopped. The Corsican fever can
pread no farther.'

'The Corsican fever? . . . In *Corsica*?'

'The answer may be there. Many, many years ago. I don't
now.'

Acronary inefficiency had made it necessary for Robert Winthrop to use a wheelchair, but in no way did it impair the awareness of his mind, nor did he dwell on the infirmity. He had spent his life in the service of his government; there was never any lack of problems he considered more important than himself.

Guests at his Georgetown home soon forgot the wheelchair. The slender figure with the graceful posture and the intensely interested face reminded them of the man he was: an energetic aristocrat who had used his private fortune to free himself from the marketplace and pursue a life of public advocacy. Instead of an infirm elder statesman with thinning grey hair and the still perfectly clipped moustache, one thought of Yalta and Potsdam and an aggressive younger man from the State Department for ever leaning over Roosevelt's chair or Truman's shoulder to clarify the point or suggest that objection.

There were many in Washington - and in London and Moscow as well - who thought the world would be a better place had Robert Winthrop been made Secretary of State by Eisenhower but the political winds had shifted and he was not a feasible choice. And later, Winthrop could not be considered; he had become involved in another area of government that required his full concentration. He had been quietly retained as Senior Consultant Diplomatic Relations, Department of State.

Twenty-six years ago Robert Winthrop had organized a select division within State called Consular Operations. And after sixteen

once having been out there and survived, there's another question. What do we do with them? They're walking explosives.'

'What are you trying to say?'

'I'm not sure, Mr Winthrop. I want to know more about him. Who is he? What is he? Where did he come from?'

'The child being the father of the man?'

'Something like that. I've read his file - a number of times, in fact - but I've yet to speak to anyone who really knows him.'

'I'm not sure you'll find such a person. Brandon . . .' The elderly statesman paused briefly and smiled. 'Incidentally, he's called Bray, for reasons I've never understood. It's the last thing he does Bray, I mean.'

'That's one of the things I have learned,' interrupted the director, returning Winthrop's smile as he sat down in a leather arm chair. 'When he was a child he had a younger sister who couldn't say Brandon; she called him Bray. The name just stuck with him.'

'That must have been added to his file after I left. Indeed, imagine a great deal has been added to that file. But as for his friends, or lack of them. He's simply a private person, quite a bit more so since his wife died.'

Congdon spoke quietly. 'She was killed, wasn't she?'

'Yes.'

'In fact, she was killed in East Berlin ten years ago next month. Isn't that right?'

'Yes.'

'And ten years ago next month you resigned the directorship of Consular Operations. The highly specialized unit you built.'

Winthrop turned, his eyes levelled at the new director. 'What was conceived and what finally emerged were two quite different entities. Consular Operations was designed as a humanitarian instrument, to facilitate the defection of thousands from a political system they found intolerable. As time went on - and circumstances seemed to warrant - the objectives were narrowed. The thousands became hundreds and, as other voices were heard, the hundreds were reduced to dozens. We were no longer interested in the scores of men and women who daily appealed to us, but instead listened to those select few whose talents and information were considered far more important than those of ordinary people. The unit was concentrated on a handful of scientists and soldiers and intelligence specialists. As it does today. That's not what we began with.'

'But as you pointed out, sir,' said Congdon, 'the circumstances warranted the change.'

Winthrop nodded. 'Don't mistake me, I'm not naive. I dealt with the Russians at Yalta, Potsdam, Casablanca. I witnessed their brutality in Hungary in 'fifty-six, and I saw the horrors of Czechoslovakia and Greece. I think I know what the Soviets are capable of as well as any strategist in covert services. And for years I permitted those more aggressive voices to speak with authority. I understood the necessity. Did you think I didn't?'

'Of course not. I simply meant . . .' Congdon hesitated.

'You simply made a connection between the murder of Scofield's wife and my resignation,' said the statesman kindly.

'Yes, sir, I did. I'm sorry, I didn't mean to pry. It's just that the circumstances . . .'

'"Warranted a change",' completed Winthrop. 'That's what happened, you know. I recruited Scofield; I'm sure that's in his file. I suspect that's why you're here tonight.'

'Then the connection? . . .' Congdon's words trailed off.

'Accurate. I felt responsible.'

'But surely there were other incidents, other men . . . and women.'

'Not the same, Mr Congdon. Do you know why Scofield's wife was selected to be the target that afternoon in East Berlin?'

'I assume it was a trap meant for Scofield himself. Only she showed up and he didn't. It happens.'

'A trap meant for Scofield? In East Berlin?'

'He had contacts in the Soviet sector. He made frequent penetrations, set up his own calls. I imagine they wanted to catch him with contact sheets. Her body was searched, her purse taken. It's not unusual.'

'Your assumption being that he'd use his wife in the operation?'

Sh . . . his cover at the embassy, but never remotely connected to his covert activities. No, Mr Congdon, you're wrong. The Russians knew they could never spring a trap on Bray Scofield in East Berlin. He was too good, too efficient . . . too elusive. So they tricked his wife into crossing the checkpoint and killed her for another purpose.'

'I beg your pardon?'

'An enraged man is a careless man. That's what the Sovi

anted to accomplish. But they, as you, misunderstood their subject. With his rage came a reaffirmation to sting the enemy in every way he could. If he was brutally professional before his life's death, he was viciously so afterwards.'

'I'm still not sure I understand.'

'Try, Mr Congdon,' said Winthrop. 'Twenty-two years ago I ran across a government major at Harvard University. A young man with a talent for languages and a certain authority about him that indicated a bright future. He was recruited through my office, sent to the Maxwell School in Syracuse, then brought to Washington to become part of Consular Operations. It was a fine beginning for a possibly brilliant career in the State Department.' Winthrop paused, his eyes straying as if lost in a personal reverie. 'I never expected him to stay in *Cons Op*; strangely enough I thought of it as a springboard for him. To the diplomatic corps, to the ambassadorial level, perhaps. His gifts cried out to be used at international conference tables . . .

'But something happened,' continued the statesman, glancing absently back at the new director. 'As *Cons Op* was changing, so was Brandon Scofield. The more vital those highly specialized defections were considered, the more quickly the violence escalated. On both sides. Very early, Scofield requested commando training. He spent five months in Central America going through the most rigorous survival techniques - offensive and defensive. He mastered codes of codes and ciphers; he was as proficient as any cryptographer in NSA. Then he returned to Europe and became the expert.'

'He understood the requirements of his work,' said Congdon, impressed. 'Very commendable, I'd say.'

'Oh yes, very,' agreed Winthrop. 'Because, you see, it had happened; he'd reached his plateau. There was no turning back, no changing. He could never be accepted around a conference table. His presence would be rejected in the strongest diplomatic terms because his reputation was established. The bright young government major I'd recruited for the State Department was now a killer. No matter the justification, he was a professional killer.'

Congdon shifted his position in the chair. 'Many would say he was a soldier in the field, the battleground extensive, dangerous . . . never-ending. He had to survive, Mr Winthrop.'

'He had to and he did,' concurred the old gentleman. 'Scofield was able to change, to adapt to the new rules. But I wasn't. When

them, either, but ever since Jack Kennedy we're all expected to keep our supply of Havanas. Do you disapprove?"

"No. As I recall, the Canadian supplier was one of President Kennedy's more accurate sources of information about Cuba."

"Have you been around that long?"

"I joined the National Security Agency when he was a senator. Did you know that Scofield has recently begun to drink steadily?"

"I know nothing about the current Scofield, as you called him."

"His file indicates the use of alcohol, but no evidence of excess."

"I would think not; it would interfere with his work."

"It may be interfering now."

"Maybe? It either is or it isn't. I don't think that's such a difficult thing to establish. If he's drinking a great deal, that's excessive and would have to interfere. I'm sorry to hear it, but I can't say I'm surprised."

"Oh?" Congdon leaned forward in the chair. It was apparent to him that he thought he was about to be given the information he was seeking. "When you knew him as well as you did, were there signs of potential instability?"

"None at all."

"But you just said you weren't surprised."

"I'm not. I wouldn't be surprised at any thinking man turning to alcohol after so many years of living so unnaturally. Scofield is - was - a thinking man, and God knows he's lived unnaturally. I'm surprised, it's only that it's taken so long to reach him, after all. What got him through the nights?"

"Men condition themselves. As you put it, he adapted. Extremely successfully."

"But still unnaturally," maintained Winthrop. "What are you going to do with him?"

"He's being recalled. I want him out of the field."

"Good. Give him a desk and an attractive secretary and have him analyse theoretical problems. Isn't that the usual way?"

Congdon hesitated before replying. "Mr Winthrop, I think I want him separated from the State Department."

The creator of *Cons Op* arched his eyebrows. "Really? Twenty-two years is insufficient for an adequate pension."

"That's not a problem; generous settlements are made. It's a common practice these days."

"Then what does he do with his life? What is he? Forty-five or six?"

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'Forty-six.'

'Hardly ready for one of these, is he?' said the statesman, fingering the wheel of his chair. 'May I ask why you've come to that conclusion?'

'I don't want him around personnel involved with covert activities. According to our latest information, he's displayed hostile reactions to basic policy. He could be a negative influence.'

Winthrop smiled. 'Someone must have pulled a beard.erry never did have much patience with fools.'

'I said basic policy, sir. Personalities are not the issue.'

'Personalities, Mr Congdon, unfortunately are intrinsic to basic policy. They form it. But that's probably beside the point . . . at this point. Why come to me? You've obviously made your decision. What can I add?'

'Your judgement. How will he take it? Can he be trusted? He knows more about our operations, our contacts, our tactics, than any man in Europe.'

Winthrop's eyes became suddenly cold. 'And what is your alternative, Mr Congdon?' he asked icily.

The new director flushed, he understood the implication. 'Surveillance, Controls, Telephone and mail intercepts. I'm being honest with you, sir.'

'Are you?' Winthrop now glared at the man in front of him. 'Or are you looking for a word from me - or a question - that you can use for another solution?'

'I don't know what you mean.'

'I think you do. I've heard how it's done, incidentally, and it appals me. Word is sent to Prague, or Berlin, or Marseilles that a man's no longer in sanction. He's finished, out. But he's not - he drinks a lot. Contacts' names might be revealed by this man, whose networks exposed. In essence, the word spreads: your lives are threatened. So it's agreed that another man, or perhaps two or three, get on planes from Prague or Berlin or Marseilles. They converge on Washington with but one objective - the slaying of that man who's finished. Everyone's more relaxed, and the American intelligence community - which has remained outside the incident - breathes easier. Yes, Mr Congdon, it appals me.'

The director of *Cons Op* remained motionless in the chair. His reply was delivered in a quiet monotone. 'To the best of my knowledge, Mr Winthrop, that solution has been exaggerated far out of proportion to its practice. Again, I'll be completely honest

with you. In fifteen years I've heard of its being exercised only twice, and in both . . . incidents . . . the agents out of sanction were beyond being salvaged. They had sold out to the Soviets; they were delivering names.'

'Is Scofield beyond salvage? That's the correct phrase, isn't it?'

'If you mean do I think he's sold out, of course not. It's the last thing he'd do. I really came here to learn more about him, I'm sincere about that. How is he going to react when I tell him he's terminated?'

Winthrop paused, his relief conveyed, then frowned again. 'I don't know because I don't know the current Scofield. It's drastic; what's he going to do? Isn't there a half-way measure?'

'If I thought there was one acceptable to us both, I'd leap at it.'

'If I were you I'd try to find one.'

'It can't be on the premises,' said Congdon firmly. 'I'm convinced of that.'

'Then may I suggest something?'

'Please do.'

'Send him as far away as you can. Some place where he'll find a useful oblivion. Suggest it yourself; he'll understand.'

He will?'

'Yes, Bray doesn't fool himself, at least he never did. It was one of his finer gifts. He'll understand because I think I do. I think you've described a dying man.'

'There's no medical evidence to support that.'

'Oh, for God's sake!' said Robert Winthrop.

Scofield walked across the hotel room and turned off the television set. He had not seen an American news broadcast in several years - since he was last brought back for an inter-operations briefing - and he was not sure he wanted to see one again for the next several years. It wasn't that he thought all news should be delivered in the ponderous tones of a funeral, but the giggles and leers that accompanied descriptions of fire and rape struck him as odd. At any moment he expected the anchormen would throw spitballs at one another and dip the blond tresses of the vacuous arts' critic into a prop inkwell.

He looked at his watch; it was twenty past seven. He knew it because his watch read twenty past midnight; he was still on Amsterdam time. His appointment at the State Department was for eight o'clock.

P.M. That was standard for specialists of his rank, but what was not standard was the State Department itself. Attachés-at-large for Consular Operations invariably held strategy conferences in safe-houses, usually in the Maryland countryside, or perhaps in hotel suites in downtown Washington.

Never at the State Department. Not for specialists expected to return to the field. But then Bray knew he was not scheduled to return to the field. He had been brought back for only one purpose: Termination.

Twenty-two years and he was out. An infinitesimal speck of time into which was compressed everything he knew – everything he had learned, absorbed and taught. He kept waiting for his own reaction, but there was none. It was as though he were a spectator watching the images of someone else on a white wall, the inevitable conclusion drawing near, but not drawing him into the events as they took place. He was only mildly curious. How would it be done?

The walls of Under-secretary of State Daniel Congdon's office were white. There was a certain comfort in that, thought Scofield as he half-listened to Congdon's droning narrative. He could see the images. Face after face, dozens of them, coming into focus and fading rapidly. Faces of people remembered and unremembered staring, thinking, weeping, laughing, dying . . . death.

His wife. Five o'clock in the afternoon. Unter den Linden.

Men and women running, stopping. In sunlight, in shadows.

But where was he? He was not there.

He was a spectator.

Then suddenly he wasn't. He could not be sure he heard the words correctly. What had this coldly efficient under-secretary said? *Bern, Switzerland?*

'I beg your pardon?'

'The funds will be deposited in your name, proportionate allocations made annually.'

'In addition to whatever pension I'm entitled to?'

'Yes, Mr Scofield. And regarding that, your service record's been predated. You'll get the maximum.'

'That's very generous.' It was. Calculating rapidly, Bray estimated that his income would be over \$50,000 a year.

'Merely practical. These funds are to take the place of any profits you might realize from the sale of books or articles based on your activities in Consular Operations.'

'I see,' said Bray slowly. 'There's been a lot of that recently, hasn't there? Marchetti, Agee, Snapp.'

'Exactly.'

Scofield could not help himself; the bastards *never* learned. 'Are you saying that if you'd banked funds for them they wouldn't have written what they did?'

'Motives vary, but we don't rule out the possibility.'

'Rule it out,' said Bray curtly. 'I know two of those men.'

'Are you rejecting the money?'

'Hell, no. I'll take it. When I decide to write a book, you'll be the first to know.'

'I wouldn't advise it, Mr Scofield. Such breaches of security are prohibited. You'd be prosecuted; years in prison inevitable.'

'And if you lost in the courts, there just *might follow* certain extralegal penalties. A shot in the head while driving in traffic, for example.'

'The laws are clear,' said the Under-Secretary. 'I can't imagine that.'

'I can. Look in my Four-Zero file. I trained with a man in Honduras. I killed him in Madrid. He was from Indianapolis and his name was . . .'

'I'm *not interested* in past activities,' interrupted Congdon sharply. 'I just want us to understand each other.'

'We do. You can relax. I'm not . . . breaching any security. I haven't the stomach for it. Also, I'm not that brave.'

'Look, Scofield,' said the under-secretary, leaning back in his chair, his expression pleasant. 'I know it sounds trite, but there comes a time for all of us to leave the more active areas of our work. I want to be honest with you.'

Bray smiled, a touch grimly. 'I'm always nervous when someone says that.'

'What?'

'That he wants to be honest with you. As if honesty was the last thing you should expect.'

'I *am* being honest.'

'So am I. If you're looking for an argument, you won't get it from me. I'll quietly fade away.'

'But we don't want you to do that,' said Congdon, leaning forward, his elbows on the desk.

'Oh?'

'Of course not. A man with your background is extraordinarily

'Precisely.'

'All right,' said Scofield, reaching into his pocket for a cigarette. 'I think you're going to a lot of unnecessary trouble to keep a ring on me, but, as you said, you're paying for it. A simple field directive could accomplish the same thing: issue clearance until rescinded. Special category.'

'Too many questions would be asked. It's easier this way.'

'Really?' Bray lit the cigarette, his eyes amused. 'All right.'

'Good.' Congdon shifted his weight in the chair. 'I'm glad we understand each other. You've earned everything we've given you and I'm sure you'll continue to earn it . . . I was looking at your file this morning; you enjoy the water. God knows your record's filled with hundreds of contacts made in boats at night. Why not try it in the daylight? You've got the money. Why not go to someplace like the Caribbean and enjoy your life? I envy you.'

Bray got up from his chair; the meeting was over. 'Thanks, I may do that. I like warm climates.' He extended his hand; Congdon rose and took it. While they shook hands, Scofield continued. 'You know that Four-Zero business would make me nervous if you hadn't called me in here.'

'What do you mean?' Their hands were clasped, but the movement stopped.

Well, our own field personnel won't know I'm terminated, but the Soviets will. They won't bother me now. When someone like me is taken out-of-strategy, everything changes: Contacts, codes, ciphers, sterile locations; nothing remains the same. They know the rules; they'll leave me alone. Thanks very much.'

'I'm not sure I understand you,' said the under-secretary.

'Oh, come on, I said I'm grateful. We both know KGB-Washington keeps its cameras trained on this place twenty-four hours a day. No specialist who's to remain in sanction is *ever* brought here. As of an hour ago they know I'm out. Thanks again, Mr Congdon. It was considerate of you.'

The Under-Secretary of State, Consular Operations, watched as Scofield walked across the office and let himself out the door.

It was over. Everything. He would never have to hurry back to an antiseptic hotel room to see what covert message had arrived. No longer would it be necessary to arrange for three changes of vehicle to get from point A to point B. The lie to Congdon notwithstanding, the Soviets probably did know he had been ter-

minated by now. If they didn't they would soon. After a few months of inactivity the KGB would accept the fact that he was no longer of value. The rules was constant; tactics and codes were altered. The Soviets would leave him alone; they would not kill him.

But the lie to Congdon had been necessary, if only to see the expression on his face. We'd like it kept out of the record, *Four Zero entry!* The man was so transparent! He really believed he had

bility.

specific lesson. But always for a reason.

living or not living. It was over.

With the exception of a single brief period – too brief, too *terribly brief* – he had not lived in a place he could call his own for twenty-two years.

But that terribly brief period, twenty-seven months in a life-

uers and she was his and . . .

Death in the Unter den Linden.

Oh, God! A telephone call and a password. Her husband
her. *Desperately*. See a guard, cross the checkpoint. *Hurry*.

And a KGB pig had no doubt laughed. Until Prague. There was no laughter in that man after Prague.

Scofield could feel the sting in his eyes. The few sudden tears had made contact with the night wind. He brushed them aside with his glove and crossed the street.

On the other side was the lighted front of a travel agency, the posters in the window displaying idealized, unreal bodies soaking up the sun. The Washington amateur, Congdon, had a point; the Caribbean was a good idea. No self-respecting intelligence service sent agents to the islands in the Caribbean – for fear of winning. Another Cuba and the Kremlin might opt for a Section Eleven. Down in the islands, the Soviets would *know* he was out-of-strategy. He had wanted to spend some time in the Grenadines; why not now? In the morning he would . . .

The figure was reflected in the glass – tiny, obscure, in the background across the wide avenue, barely noticeable. In fact, Bray would *not* have noticed had the man not walked around the spill of a streetlamp. Whoever it was wanted the protection of the shadows in the street, whoever it was was following him. And he was good. There were no abrupt movements, no sudden jumping away from the light. The walk was casual, unobtrusive. He wondered if it was anyone he had trained.

Scofield appreciated professionalism; he would commend the man and wish him a lesser subject for surveillance next time. The State Department was not wasting a moment. Congdon wanted the reports to begin at once. Bray smiled; he would give the under-secretary his initial report. Not the one he wanted, but one he should have.

The amusement began, a short-lived pavane between professionals. Scofield walked away from the shop window, gathering speed until he reached the corner, where the circles of light from the four opposing streetlamps overlapped each other. He turned abruptly left, as if to head back to the other side of the street, then half-way through the intersection stopped. He paused in the middle of the traffic lane and looked up at the street sign – a man confused not sure of where he was. Then he turned and walked rapidly back to the corner, his pace quickening until he was practically running when he reached the curb. He continued down the pavement to the first unlighted shopfront, then he spun into the darkness of the doorway and waited.

Through the right-angled glass he had a clear view of the corner

the man following him would have to come into the overlapping circles of light now; they could not be avoided. A quarry was at hand! There was no time to look for shade.

His face came into the light.

Scofield froze. His eyes ached; blood rushed to his head. His whole body trembled, and what remained of his mind tried desperately to control the rage and the anguish that welled up and swept through him. The man at the corner was not from the State Department, the face under the light did not belong to anyone remotely connected to American intelligence.

It belonged to the KGB. To KGB-East Berlin.

It was a face on one of the half-dozen photographs he had studied—studied until he knew every blemish, every strand of hair—in Berlin ten years ago.

Death on the Unter den Linden. His beautiful Karine, his lovable Karine. Trapped by a team across the checkpoint, a unit set up by the filthiest killer in the Soviet. V. Taleniekov. Animal. This was one of those men. That unit. One of Taleniekov's hangmen. Here! In Washington! Within minutes of his termination at Intel.

So KGB had found out. And someone in Moscow had decided to bring a stunning conclusion to the finish of Beowulf Agate. Only one man could think with such dramatic precision. V. Taleniekov. Animal.

As Bray stared through the glass, he knew what he was going to do, what he had to do. He would send a last message to Moscow; it would be a fitting capstone, a final gesture to mark the end of one life and the beginning of another—whatever it might be.

He would trap the killer from KGB. He would kill him. Scofield stepped out of the doorway and ran down the sidewalk, zigzagging in a zigzag pattern across the deserted street. He could hear running footsteps behind him.

6

Aeroflot's night flight from Moscow approached the Sea of Azov north-east of Crimea. It would arrive in Sevastopol by one o'clock in the morning, something over an hour. The aircraft was crowded, the passengers by and large jubilant, on winter holiday leave from their offices and factories. A scattering of military personnel - soldiers and sailors - were less exuberant; for them the Black Sea was not a vacation, but a return to work at the naval and air bases. They'd had their leaves in Moscow.

In one of the rear seats sat a man with a dark leather violin case held firmly between his knees. His clothes were rumpled, undistinguished, somehow in conflict with the strong face and the sharp, clear eyes that seemed to belong above other apparel. His papers identified him as Pyotr Rydkov, musician. His flight pass explained curtly that he was on the way to join the Sevastopol Symphony Orchestra as a violinist.

Both items were false. The man was Vasil Talenichov, master strategist, Soviet Intelligence.

Former master strategist. Former director of KGB operations - East Berlin, Warsaw, Prague, Riga and the South-west Sector, which consisted of Sevastopol, the Bosphorus, the Sea of Marmara and the Dardanelles. It was this last post that dictated the papers that put him on board the Sevastopol plane. It was the beginning of his flight from Russia.

There were scores of escape routes out of the Soviet Union, and in his professional capacity he had exposed them as he had found

em. Ruthlessly, more often than not killing the agents of the West who kept them open, enticing malcontents to betray Russia with lies and promises of money. Always money. He had never wavered in his opposition to the liars and the proselytizers of greed; his escape route was too insignificant to warrant his attention.

Except one. A minor network-route through the Bosphorus and the Sea of Marmara into the Dardanelles. He had uncovered it several months ago, during his last weeks as director, KGB South-East Soviet Sectors. During the days when he found himself in continuous confrontation with hot-headed fools at the military bases and astinine edicts from Moscow itself.

At the time, he was not sure why he held back exposure; for a while he had convinced himself that by leaving it open and watching it closely, it could lead to a larger network. Yet in the back of his mind, he knew that was not true.

His time was coming; he was making too many enemies in too many places. There could be those who felt that a quiet retirement north of Grasnov was not for a man who held the secrets of the KGB in his head. Now he possessed another secret, more frightening than anything conceived of by Soviet intelligence. The Matarese. And that secret was driving him out of Russia.

United States against one another, until it consumed one or the other. A Premier and a President, one or both to be in a gunsight. Who were they? What were they, this fever that had begun in the first decades of the century in Corsica? The Corsican fever. The Matarese.

But it existed; it was functioning - alive and deadly. He knew that now. He had spoken its name, and for speaking it, a plan had been put in motion that called for his arrest; the sentence of execution would follow shortly.

Krupsky had told him that going to the Premier was out of the question so he had sought out four once-powerful leaders of the Kremlin, now generously retired, which meant that none would touch them. With each he had spoken of the strange phenomenon the Matarese, repeated the words whispered by the architect.

One man obviously knew nothing; he was as stunned as Taleniekov had been. Two *said* nothing, but the acknowledgement was in their eyes, and in their frightened voices when they protested. Neither would be a party to the spreading of such insanity; each had ordered Vasili from his house.

The last man, a Georgian, was the oldest – older than the dead Krupsky – and in spite of an upright posture had little time left to enjoy a straight spine. He was ninety-six, his mind alert but given swiftly to an old man's fear. At the mention of the name Matarese, his thin, veined hands had trembled, then tiny muscular spasms seemed to spread across his ancient, withered face. His throat became suddenly dry; his voice cracked, his words barely audible.

It was a name from long ago in the past, the old Georgian had whispered, a name no one should hear. He had survived the early purges, survived the mad Stalin, the insidious Beria, but no one could survive the Matarese. In the name of all things sacred to Russia, the terrified man pleaded, walk *away* from the Matarese!

'We were fools, but we were not the only ones. Powerful men everywhere were seduced by the sweet convenience of having enemies and obstacles eliminated. The guarantee was absolute: the eliminations would never be traced to those who required them. Agreements were made through parties four and five times removed, dealing in fictitious purchases, unaware of what they were buying. Krupsky saw the danger; he knew. He warned us in 'forty-eight never to make contact again.'

'Why did he do that?' Vasili had asked. 'If the guarantee was proven true. I speak professionally.'

'Because the Matarese added a condition: the council of the Matarese demanded the right of approval. That's what I was told.'

'The prerogative of killers-for-hire, I'd think,' Taleniekov had interjected. 'Some targets simply aren't feasible.'

'Such approval was never sought in the past. Krupsky did not think it was based on feasibility.'

'On what, then?'

'Ultimate extortion.'

'How were the contacts made with this council?'

'I never knew. Neither did Aleksie.'

'Someone had to make them.'

'If they are alive, they will not speak. Krupsky was right about that.'

'He called it the Corsican fever. He said the answers might be in Corsica.'

'It's possible. It's where it began, with the maniac of Corsica Guillaume de Matarese.'

'You still have influence with the party leaders, sir. Will you ...'

'You've misunderstood me. It is *I* who want to stop *it*. *Them*. This Matarese council. I gave my word to Aleksie that ...'

'But you've had no words with *me*!' the withered, once-powerful leader had shouted, his voice childlike in its panic. 'I will deny you ever came here, deny anything you say! You are a stranger, and I do not know you!'

Vasili had left, disturbed, perplexed. He had returned to his flat expecting to spend the night analysing the enigma that was the Matarese, trying to decide what to do next. As usual he had glanced at the mailslot in the wall, he had actually taken a step away before he realized there was something inside.

It was a note from his contact at the VKR, written in one of the cryptical codes they had arranged between them. The words were innocuous: an agreement to have a late dinner at 11.30 and signed with a girl's first name. The very blandness of the note concealed its meaning. There was a problem of magnitude; the use of *eleven* meant emergency. No time was to be lost making contact; his friend would be waiting for him at the usual place.

He had been there. At a *piva kafe* near the Lomonossov State University. It was a raucous drinking establishment in tune with ...

but that's the word.'

'Because of the Jew?'

What you did was no longer a joke, but rather a serious interference with basic policy.'

'Yesterday?' Vasili had asked his friend.

'Late afternoon. Past four o'clock. That bitch director marched through the offices like a gorilla in season. She smelled a gang rape and she loved it. She told each division man to be at her office at five o'clock. When we got there and listened, it was unbelievable. It was as if you were personally responsible for every setback we've sustained for the past two years. Those maniacs from Group Nine were there, but not the section chief.'

'How long have I got?'

'Three or four days at the outside. Incriminating evidence against you is being compiled. But silently, no one is to say anything.'

'Yesterday...'

'What happened, Vasili? This isn't a VKR operation. It's something else.'

It was something else and Taleniekov had recognized it instantly. The yesterday in question had been the day he had seen the two former Kremlin officials who had ordered him from their prison. The something else was the Matarese.

'One day I'll tell you, my friend,' Vasili had answered. 'Trust me.'

'Of course. You're the best we have. The best we've ever had.'

'Right now I need thirty-six, perhaps forty-eight hours. Do I have them?'

'I think so. They want your head, but they'll be careful. They'll document as much as they can.'

'I'm sure they will. One needs words to read over the corpse. Thank you. You'll hear from me.'

Vasili had not returned to his flat, but instead to his office. He had sat in the darkness for hours, arriving at his extraordinary decision. Hours before it would have been unthinkable, but not now. If the Matarese could corrupt the highest levels of the KGB, it could do the same in Washington. If the mere mentioning of its name called for the death of a master strategist of his rank - and there was no mistaking it: death was the objective - then the power it possessed was unthinkable. If, in truth, it was responsible for the murders of Blackburn and Yurievich, then Krupsky was right. There was a timetable. The Matarese were closing in, the Premier or President moving into the gunsight.

Taleniekov was startled. He had not expected so quick a reply from his man there. 'It could. What have you got?'

'It came in two hours ago; it took that long to break. Our cryptographer – the man you brought from Riga – recognized an old code of yours. We were going to send it on to Moscow with the morning's dispatches.'

'Don't do that,' said Vasili. 'Read it to me.'

'Wait a minute.' Papers were shuffled. 'Here it is. "Beowulf removed from orbit. Storm clouds Washington. On strength of imperative will pursue and deliver white contact. Cable instructions capitol depot." That's it.'

'It's enough,' said Taleniekov.

'Sounds impressive, Vasili. A white contact? You've struck a high-level defection, I gather. Good for you. Is it tied in with your probe?'

'I think so,' lied Taleniekov. 'But don't say anything. Keep VKR out.'

'With pleasure. You want us to cable for you?'

'No,' replied Vasili, 'I can do it. It's routine. I'll call you this evening. Say nine-thirty; that should be time enough. Tell my old friend from Riga I said hello. No one else, however. And thank you.'

'When your probe's over, let's have dinner. It's good to have you back in Sevastopol.'

'It's good to be back. We'll talk.' Taleniekov hung up, concentrating on the message from Amsterdam. Scofield had been recalled to Washington, but the circumstances were abnormal: Beowulf Agate had run into a severe State Department storm. That fact alone was enough to propel the agent from Brussels into a transatlantic pursuit, debts notwithstanding. A white status contact was a momentary truce; a truce generally meant that someone was about to do something drastic. And if there existed even the remote possibility that the legendary Scofield might defect, any risk was worth the candle. The man who brought in Beowulf Agate would have all of Soviet Intelligence at his feet.

But defection was not possible for Scofield . . . any more than it was for him. The enemy was the enemy; that would never change.

Vasili picked up the phone again. There was an all-night number in the Lazarev district of the waterfront used by Greek and Iranian businessmen to send out cables to their home offices. By saying the right words, priority would be given over the existing

essional. As the previous director of the KGB sector, he had not exposed the escape route for personal reasons. However, if a musician named Pietre Rydukov did not make a telephone call to Sevastopol within two days after departure, exposure was guaranteed, KGB reprisals to follow. It would be a shame; other privileged men might wish to use the route later, their talents and information worth having.

Taleniekov put on the undistinguished, ill-fitting overcoat and his battered hat. A slouch and a pair of steel-rimmed spectacles were added. He checked his appearance in the mirror; it was satisfactory. He picked up the leather violin case; it completed his disguise, for no musician left his instrument in a strange hotel room. He went out the door, down the staircase—never an elevator—and out into the Sevastopol streets. He would walk to the waterfront; he knew where to go and what to say.

Fog rolled in from the sea, curling through the beams of the floodlights on the pier. There was activity everywhere as the hold of the freighter was loaded. Men shouted as giant cranes swung cables cradling enormous boxcars of merchandise over the side of the ship. The loading crews were Russian, supervised by Greeks. Soldiers and *militsiyaneri* milled about, weapons slung casually over their shoulder, ineffectual patrols more interested in watching the machinery than in looking for irregularities.

If they wanted to know, mused Vasili as he approached the officer at the entrance gate, he could tell them. The irregularities were in the huge containers being lifted over the hull of the ship. Men and women packed in shredded cardboard, tubes from mouths to airspaces where necessary, instructions having been given to empty bladders and bowels several hours ago; there would be no relief until well past midnight when they were at sea.

The officer at the gate was a young lieutenant, bored with his work, irritation in his face. He scowled at the slouching, bespectacled old man before him.

'What do you want? The pier is off-limits unless you have a pass.' He pointed to the violin case. 'What's that?'

'My livelihood, Lieutenant. I'm with the Sevastopol Symphony.'

'I wasn't aware of any concerts scheduled for the docks.'

'Your name, please?' said Vasili casually.

'What?'

Taleniekov stood up to his full height, the slouch gradually but

early disappearing. 'I asked you your name, Lieutenant.'
'What for?' The officer was somewhat less hostile, Vasili removed the spectacles and looked sternly into his bewildered eyes.
'For a commendation or a reprimand.'
'What are you talking about? Who are you?'
'KGB-Sevastopol. This is part of our waterfront inspection programme.'

The young lieutenant was politely hesitant; he was not a fool. 'I'm afraid I wasn't told, sir. I'll have to ask for your identification.'
'If you doubt it, you could try the first one,' said Taleniekov, 'the second would be the third. It's a long night. The name, please.'

The lieutenant told him, then added, 'Do you people suspect trouble down here?' He studied the plastic card and returned it.

'Trouble?' Taleniekov smiled, his eyes humorous and conspiratorial. 'The only trouble, Lieutenant, is that I'm being deprived of a warm dinner in the company of a lady. I think the new directors in Sevastopol feel compelled to earn their roubles. You men are doing a good job; they know that but don't care to admit it.'

Relieved, the young officer smiled back. 'Thank you, sir. We do our best in a monotonous job.'

'But don't say anything about my being here; they're serious about that. Two officers of the guard were reported last week.' Vasili smiled again. 'In the directors' secrecy lies their true security. Their jobs.'

The lieutenant grinned. 'I understand. Have you a weapon in case?'

'No. Actually, it's a very good violin. I wish I could play it.'

Both men nodded.

... was American.

Karras Zaimis was a CIA agent, formerly station chief in Salonika, now field expediter of the escape route. Vasili knew the agent's face from several photographs he had removed from the KGB files. He peered through the bodies and the fog and the floodlights; he could not spot the man.

Taleniekov threaded his way past rushing fork-lifts and crews of

complaining labourers towards the huge cargo warehouse. Inside the enormous enclosure, the light was dim, the wire-meshed floodlights too high in the ceiling to do much good. Beams of flashlights crisscrossed the containers; men were checking numbers. Vasili wondered briefly how much talent was in those box cars. How much information was being taken out of Russia. Actually, not a great deal of either, he reminded himself. This was a minor escape route; more comfortable accommodation was provided for serious talent and significant bearers of intelligence data.

His slouch controlling his walk and his spectacles awkwardly in place, he excused himself past a Greek supervisor arguing with a Russian foreman. He wandered towards the rear of the warehouse past stacks of cartons and aisles blocked with freight dollies studying the faces of those holding flashlights. He was becoming annoyed; he did not have the time to waste. Where was Zaimis? There had been *no* change of status; the freighter *was* the carrier, the agent *still* the conduit. He had read every report sent from Sevastopol; there had been no mention of the escape route whatsoever. Where *was* he?

Suddenly Talenickov felt a shock of pain as the barrel of a gun was shoved viciously into his right kidney. Strong fingers gripped the loose cloth of his overcoat, crunching the flesh of his lower rib cage; he was propelled into a deserted aisle. Words were whispered harshly in English.

'I won't bother speaking Greek, or trying to get through to you in Russian. I'm told your English is as good as anyone's in Washington.'

'Conceivably better than most,' said Vasili through his teeth. 'Zaimis?'

'Never heard of him. We thought you were out of Sevastopol.'

'I am. Where is Zaimis? I must speak with Zaimis.'

The American disregarded the question. 'You've got balls, I'll say that for you. There's no one from KGB within ten blocks of here.'

'Are you sure about that?'

'Very. We've got a flock of night owls out there. They see in the dark. They saw you. A violin case, *Christ!*'

'Do they look to the water?'

'Seagulls do that.'

'You're very well organized, all you birds.'

'And you're less bright than everyone says. What did you think

ever entered my mind, I'd contact the British, or the French before you. I said I wanted to get out of Russia not betray it.'

'You're lying,' said the American, his hand slipping down to the lapel of his heavy cloth jacket. 'You can go to anywhere you want.'

'Not at the moment, I'm afraid. There are complications.'

'What did you do, turn capitalist? Make off with a couple of pouches?'

'Come on, Zaimis. Which of us doesn't have his small box of resources? Often legitimate; funnelled monies can be delayed. Where's yours? I doubt Athens, and Rome is too unstable. I'd guess Berlin or London. Mine's quite ordinary: certificates of deposit, Chase Manhattan, New York City.'

The CIA man's expression remained passive, his thumb curled beneath his jacket's lapel. 'So you got caught,' he said absently.

'We're wasting time!' Vasili barked. 'Get me to the Dardanelles. I'll make my own way from there. If you don't, if a telephone call is not received here in Sevastopol when expected, your operation is finished. You'll be . . .'

Zaimis' hand shot up towards his mouth; Taleniekov grabbed the agent's fingers and twisted them violently outward. Stuck to the American's thumb was a small tablet.

'You damn fool! What do you think you're doing?'

'I winced, the pain excruciating. 'I'd rather go this way in the *Lubyanka*.'

'You ass! If anyone goes to the *Lubyanka*, it will be *me*! Because there are maniacs just like you sitting at their desks in Moscow. And *fools* – just like you – who would prefer a tablet rather than listen to the truth! You want to die, I'll accommodate you. But first get me to the Dardanelles!'

The agent, breathing with difficulty, stared at Taleniekov. Vasili released his hand, removing the tablet from Zaimis' thumb.

'You're for real, aren't you?' Zaimis said.

'I'm for real. Will you help me?'

'I haven't got anything to lose,' said the agent. 'You'll be on our carrier.'

'Don't forget. Word must get back here from the Dardanelles. If it doesn't, you're finished.'

Zaimis paused, then nodded. 'Check. We trade off.'

'We trade off,' agreed Taleniekov. 'Now, can you get me to a telephone?'

*

The cinderblock cubicle in the warehouse had two phones – installed by Russians and no doubt electronically monitored by SAVAK and the CIA for intercepts, thought Vasili. They would be sterile; he could talk. The American agent picked up his when Taleniev finished dialling. The instant the call was answered, Vasili spoke.

'Is this you, my old comrade?'

It was and it was not. It was not the section chief he had spoken with earlier; instead, it was the cryptographer Taleniev had trained years ago in Riga and brought to Sevastopol. The man's voice was low, anxious.

'Our mutual friend was called to the code room; it was arranged. I said I'd wait for your call. I have to see you right away. Where are you?'

Zaimis reached over, his bruised fingers gripping the mouthpiece of Vasili's phone. Taleniev shook his head; in spite of the fact that he trusted the cryptographer, he had no intention of answering the question.

'That's of no consequence. Did the cable come from "depot"?''

'A great deal more than that, old friend.'

'But it *came*?' pressed Vasili.

'Yes. But it's not in any cipher I've ever heard of. Nothing you and I ever used before. Neither during our years in Riga nor here.'

'Read it to me.'

'There's something else,' insisted the code man, his tone now intense. 'They're after you *openly*. I recycled the teletype to Moscow for in-house confirmation and burnt the original. It will be back in less than two hours. I can't *believe* it. I *won't* believe it!'

'Calm down. What was it?'

'There's an alert out for you from the Baltic to the Manchurian borders.'

'VKR?' asked Vasili, alarmed but controlled; he had expected Group Nine to act swiftly but not quite this swiftly.

'Not just VKR. KGB – and every intelligence station we have! As well as all military units. *Everywhere*. This isn't *you* they speak of; it couldn't be. I will not believe it!'

'What do they say?'

'That you've betrayed the State. You're to be taken, but to be no *detention*, no interrogation *at all*. You're to be . . . e . . . without delay.'

'I see,' said Taleniev. And he did see; he expected it.

not the VKR. It was powerful men who'd heard he had spoken a name that no one should hear. *Matarese*. 'I've betrayed no one. Believe that.'

'I do. I know you.'

'Read me the cable from "depot".'

'Very well. Have you a pencil? It makes no sense.'

Vasili reached into his pocket for his pen; there was paper on the table. 'Go ahead.'

The man spoke slowly, clearly. 'As follows: "Invitation Kasimir Schrankenwarten five goals" . . .' The cryptographer stopped. Taleniekov could hear voices in the distance over the line. 'I can't go on. People are coming,' he said.

'I *must* have the rest of that cable!'

'Thirty minutes. *Amar Magazin*. I'll be there.' The line went down.

Vasili slammed his fist on the table, then replaced the phone. Zaimis did the same. 'I *must have it*,' he repeated in English.

'What's the *Amar Magazin* - the Lobster Shop?' asked the CIA man.

'A fish restaurant on Kerenski Street, about seven blocks from headquarters. No one who knows Sevastopol goes there; the food is terrible. But it fits what he was trying to tell me.'

'What's that?'

'Whenever the cryptographer wanted me to screen certain coming material before others saw it, he would suggest we meet at the *Amar*.'

'He didn't just come to your office and talk?'

Taleniekov glanced over at the American. 'You know better than that, Karras Zaimis. You people perfected electronic surveillance. We merely stole it.'

The agent looked hard at Vasili. 'They want you very dead, don't they?'

'It's a gargantuan error.'

'It always is,' said Zaimis, frowning. 'You trust him?'

'You heard him. When do you sail?'

'Eleven-thirty. Two hours. Roughly the same time that confirmation's due back from Moscow.'

'I'll be here.'

'I know you will,' said the agent. 'Because I'm going with you.'

'You *what*?'

'I've got protection out there in the city. Of course, I'll want my

back. And yours. We'll see how much you want to get through the Bosphorus.'

'Why should you do this?'

'I have an idea you may reconsider that unthinkable option of yours. I want to bring you in.'

Vasili shook his head slowly. 'Nothing ever changes. It will not change. I am it.' Vasili's eyes were dead and didn't know how to look at the American.

'We'll see. You want to get to the Dardanelles?'

'Of course.'

'Give me the gun,' said the American.

The restaurant was filled, the waiters' aprons as dirty as the sawdust on the floor. Taleniekov sat alone by the right rear wall, behind two tables away in the company of a Greek merchant seaman whose face was creased with loathing for his surroundings. Vasili sipped iced vodka which helped disguise the taste of the fifth-rate caviar.

The cryptographer came through the door, spotted Taleniekov, and weaved his way awkwardly between waiters and patrons to the table. His eyes behind the thick lenses of his glasses conveyed at once joy and fear and a hundred unspoken questions.

'It's all so incredible,' he said, sitting down. 'What have they done to you?'

'It's what they're doing to themselves,' replied Vasili. 'They don't want to listen, they don't want to hear what has to be said, what has to be stopped. It's all I can tell you.'

'But to call for your *execution*. It's inconceivable!'

'Don't worry, old friend. I'll be back – and, as they say – rehabilitated with honours.' Taleniekov smiled and touched the man's arm. 'Never forget. There are good and decent men in Moscow, more committed to their country than to their own fears and ambitions. They'll always be there, and those are the men that I will reach. They'll welcome me and thank me for what I've done. Believe that . . . Now, we're dealing in minutes. Where is the cable?'

The cryptographer opened his hand. The paper was neatly folded, creased into his palm. 'I wanted to be able to throw it away, if I had to. I know the words.' He handed the cipher to Vasili.

gun back. *And yours. We'll see how much you want to get through the Bosphorus.*

'Why should you do this?'

'I have an idea you may reconsider that unthinkable option of yours. I want to bring you in.'

Vasili shook his head slowly. 'Nothing ever changes. It will not happen. I can still expose you and you don't know how. And by exposing you, I blow apart your Black Sea network. It would take years to re-establish. Time is always the issue, isn't it?'

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'But to call for more guns?'

... early it welcome me and thank me for what I've done. Believe that . . . Now, we're dealing in minutes. Where is the cable?'

The cryptographer opened his hand. The paper was neatly folded, creased into his palm. 'I wanted to be able to throw it away, if I had to. I know the words.' He handed the cipher to Vasili.

A dread came over Taleniekov as he read the message from Washington.

Invitation Kasimir. Schrankenwarten five goals, Unter den Linden. Przseclvac zero. Prague. Repeat text. Zero. Repeat again at will. Zero.

Beowulf Agate

When he had finished reading, the former master strategist of KGB whispered, 'Nothing ever changes.'

'What is it?' asked the cryptographer. 'I didn't understand it. It's no code we've ever used.'

'There's no way that you could understand,' answered Vasili, anger and sadness in his voice. 'It's a combination of two codes. Ours and theirs. Ours from the days in East Berlin, theirs from Prague. This cable was not sent by the man from Brussels. It was sent by a killer who won't stop killing.'

It happened so fast there were only seconds to react, and the Greek seaman moved first. His weathered face had been turned towards the incoming customers. He spat out the words.

'Watch it! The goats are filthy!'

Taleniekov looked up; the cryptographer spun in his chair. Twenty feet away, in an aisle peopled by waiters, were two men who had not come in for a meal; their expressions were set, their eyes darting about the room. They were scanning the tables but not for friends.

'Oh, my God!' whispered the cryptographer turning back to Vasili. 'They found the phone and tapped it. I was afraid of that.'

'Followed you, yes,' said Taleniekov, glancing over at Zaimis, who was half out of his chair, the idiot. 'They know we're friends; you're being watched. But they didn't find the phone. If they were certain that I was here, they'd break in with a dozen soldiers. They're district VKR. I know them. Calmly now, take off your hat and slide out of your chair. Head towards the back hallway, to the men's room. There's a rear exit, remember?'

'Yes, yes, I remember,' spluttered the man nervously. He got up, his shoulders hunched, and started for the narrow corridor several tables away.

But he was an academic, not a field man, and Vasili cursed himself for trying to instruct him. One of the two VKR men spotted him and came forward, pushing aside the waiters in the aisle.

Then he saw Taleniekov and his hand whipped into the open

face of his jacket towards an unseen weapon. As he did so, the Greek seaman lurched up from his chair, weaving unsteadily, waving his arms like a man with too much vodka in him. He jammed against the VKR man, who tried to push him away. The Greek feigned drunken indignation and pushed back with such force that the Russian went sprawling over a table, sending dishes and food crashing to the floor.

Vasili sprang up and raced past his old friend from Riga, pulling him towards the narrow hallway; then he saw the American. Aimis was on his feet, his gun in his hand. *Idiot!*

'Put that *away!*' shouted Taleniekov. 'Don't expose . . .'

It was too late. A gunshot exploded through the sounds of chaos, escalating it instantly into pandemonium. The CIA man brought both his hands to his chest as he fell, the shirt beneath his jacket suddenly drenched with blood.

Vasili grabbed the cryptographer by the shoulder, yanking him through the narrow archway. There was a second gunshot; the code man arched spastically, his legs together, an eruption of flesh at his throat. He had been shot through the back of the neck.

Taleniekov lunged to the floor of the hallway, stunned at what followed. He heard a third gunshot, a shrill scream after it, penetrating the cacophony of screams surrounding it. And then the Greek seaman crashed through the archway, an automatic in his hand.

'Is there a way out back here?' he roared in broken English. 'We have to run. The first goat got away. Others will come!'

Taleniekov scrambled to his feet and gestured for the Greek to follow him. Together they raced through a door into a kitchen filled with the terrified cooks and waiters, and out into an alley. They turned left and ran through a maze of dark connecting pavements between the old buildings until they reached the back streets of Sevastopol.

They kept running for over a mile. Vasili knew every inch of the city, but it was the Greek who kept shouting the turns they must make. As they entered a dimly lit side street, the seaman grabbed Taleniekov's arm, the man was out of breath.

'We can rest here for a minute,' he said, gasping for air. 'They won't find us.'

'It's not a place we think of first in a search,' agreed Vasili, looking at the row of neat apartment buildings.

'Always hide out in a well-kept neighbourhood,' said the

seaman. 'The residents veer away from controversy; they'd inform on you in a minute. Everybody knows it so they don't look in such places.'

'You say we can stay "for a minute",' said Talenickov. 'I'm not sure where we'll go after that. I need time to think.'

'You rule out the ship then?' asked the Greek, nodding, still breathless. 'I thought so.'

'Yes. Zaimis had papers on him. Worse, he had my gun. The VKR will be swarming over the piers within the hour.'

The Greek studied Vasili in the dim light. 'So the great Talenickov flees Russia. He can remain only as a corpse.'

'Not from Russia, only from frightened men. But I do have to leave - for a while. I've got to figure out how.'

'There is a way,' said the merchant seaman simply. 'We'll head over the north-west coast, then south into the mountains. You'll be in Greece in three days.'

'How?'

'There's a convoy of trucks that goes first to Odessa . . .'

Talenickov sat on the hard bench in the back of the truck, the early light of dawn seeping through the billowing canvas flaps that covered the sides. In a while, he and the others would have to crawl beneath the floor boards, remaining motionless and silent on a concealed ledge between the axles, while they passed through the next checkpoint. But for an hour or so they could stretch and breathe air that did not reek of burned oil and grease.

He reached into his pocket and took out the cipher from Washington, the cable that had already cost three lives.

Invitation Kasimir. Schrankenwarten five goals, Unter den Linden. Przseclvac zero. Prague. Repeat text. Zero. Repeat again at will. Zero.

Beowulf Agate

Two codes. One meaning.

With his pen, Vasili wrote out that meaning beneath the cipher. *Come and take me, as you took someone else across a checkpoint at five o'clock on the Unter den Linden. I've broken and killed your courier, as another courier was killed in Prague. Repeat: Come to me. I'll kill you.*

Scofield

Beyond the American killer's brutal decision, the most electrifying aspect of Scofield's cable was the fact that he was no longer in the service of his country. He had been separated from the intelligence community. And considering what he had done and the pathological forces that drove him to do it, the separation was undoubtedly savage. For no government professional would murder a courier in the circumstances of this extraordinary Soviet contact. And if Scofield was nothing else, he was a professional.

The storm clouds over Washington had been catastrophic for Beowulf Agate. They had destroyed him.

As the storm over Moscow had destroyed a master strategist named Talenievkov.

It was strange, bordering on the macabre. Two enemies who loathed each other had been chosen by the Matarese as the first of its lethal decoys – plays and diversions, as old Krupsky had called them. Yet only one of those enemies knew it; the other did not. He was concerned solely with ripping scars open, letting the blood between them flow again.

Vasili put the paper back into his pocket, and breathed deeply. The coming days would be filled with move and countermove, two experts stalking each other until the inevitable confrontation.

My name is Talenievkov. We will kill each other or we will talk.

'Who was the man, Mr Secretary?'

'He was a Soviet intelligence officer stationed in Brussels. The ambassador was frank; the KGB had no knowledge he was in Washington.'

'A possible defection?'

'There's no evidence whatsoever to support that.'

'Then what ties him to Scofield? Beyond the method of dispatch and delivery.'

The Secretary of State paused, then replied carefully. 'You must understand, Mr Congdon, the ambassador and I have a unique relationship that goes back several decades. We are often more candid with each other than diplomatic. Always with the understanding that neither speaks for the record.'

'I understand, sir,' said Congdon, realizing that the answer about to be given could never be referred to officially.

'The intelligence officer in question was a member of a KGB unit in East Berlin roughly ten years ago. I assume in the light of your recent decisions that you're familiar with Scofield's file.'

'His wife?' Congdon sat down. 'The man was one of those who killed Scofield's wife?'

'The ambassador made no reference to Scofield's wife; he merely mentioned the fact that the dead man had been part of a relatively autonomous section of the KGB in East Berlin ten years ago.'

'That section was controlled by a strategist named Taleniekov. He gave the orders.'

'Yes,' said the Secretary of State. 'We discussed Mr Taleniekov and the subsequent incident several years later in Prague at some length. We looked for the connection you've just considered. It may exist.'

'How is that, sir?'

'Vasili Taleniekov disappeared two days ago.'

'Disappeared?'

'Yes, Mr Congdon. Think about it. Taleniekov learned that he was to be officially retired, mounted a simple but effective cover, and disappeared.'

'Scofield's been terminated . . .' Congdon spoke softly, as much to himself as into the telephone.

'Exactly,' agreed the Secretary of State. 'The parallel is our immediate concern. Two retired specialists now bent on doing what they could not do - or pursue - officially. Kill each other.'

Under-Secretary of State Daniel Congdon shot up from the chair, the telephone in his hand. Since his early days at NSA he had learned that one way of controlling an outburst was to physically move during a moment of crisis. And control was the key to everything in his profession; at least, the appearance of it. He listened as this particular crisis was defined by an angry Secretary of State. Goddamn it, *he* was controlled.

'I've just met privately with the Soviet ambassador and we both agree the incident must not be made public. The important thing now is to bring Scofield in.'

'Are you *certain* it was Scofield, sir? I can't believe it!'

'Let's say that until he denies it with irrefutable proof that he was a thousand miles away during the past forty-eight hours we must assume it *had* to be Scofield. No one else in clandestine operations would have committed such an act. It's unthinkable.'

Unthinkable? *Incredible*. The body of a dead Russian delivered through the gates of the Soviet Embassy in the back seat of a Yellow Cab at 8.30 in the morning at the height of Washington's rush-hour traffic. And a driver who knew absolutely nothing except that he had picked up *two* drunks, not one - although one was in worse shape than the other. What the hell had happened to the other guy? The one who sounded like a Russkie and wore a hat and dark glasses and said the sunlight was too bright after a whole night of *Wodka*. Where was he? And was the fellow in the back seat all right? He looked like a mess.

'Who was the man, Mr Secretary?'

'He was a Soviet intelligence officer stationed in Brussels. The ambassador was frank; the KGB had no knowledge he was in Washington.'

'A possible defection?'

'There's no evidence whatsoever to support that.'

'Then what ties him to Scofield? Beyond the method of dispatch and delivery.'

The Secretary of State paused, then replied carefully. 'You must understand, Mr Congdon, the ambassador and I have a unique relationship that goes back several decades. We are often more candid with each other than diplomatic. Always with the understanding that neither speaks for the record.'

'I understand, sir,' said Congdon, realizing that the answer about to be given could never be referred to officially.

'The intelligence officer in question was a member of a KGB unit in East Berlin roughly ten years ago. I assume in the light of your recent decisions that you're familiar with Scofield's file.'

'His wife?' Congdon sat down. 'The man was one of those who killed Scofield's wife?'

The ambassador made no reference to Scofield's wife; he merely mentioned the fact that the dead man had been part of a relatively autonomous section of the KGB in East Berlin ten years ago.'

'That section was controlled by a strategist named Talenickov. He gave the orders.'

'Yes,' said the Secretary of State. 'We discussed Mr Talenickov and the subsequent incident several years later in Prague at some length. We looked for the connection you've just considered. It may exist.'

'How is that, sir?'

'Vasil Talenickov disappeared two days ago.'

'Disappeared?'

'Yes, Mr Congdon. Think about it. Talenickov learned that he was to be officially retired, mounted a simple but effective cover, and disappeared.'

'Scofield's been terminated . . .' Congdon spoke softly, as much to himself as into the telephone.

'Exactly,' agreed the Secretary of State. 'The parallel is our immediate concern. Two retired specialists now bent on doing what they could not do – or pursue – officially. Kill each other

They have contacts everywhere, men who are loyal to them for any number of reasons. Their personal vendetta could create untold problems for both governments during these precious months of conciliation. This cannot happen.'

The director of *Cons Op* frowned; there was something wrong in the Secretary's conclusions. 'I spoke with Scofield myself three nights ago. He didn't appear consumed with anger or revenge or anything like that. He was a tired field agent who'd lived . . . abnormally . . . for a long time. For years. He told me he just wanted to fade away, and I believed him. I discussed Scofield with Robert Winthrop, by the way, and he felt the same way about him. He said . . .'

'Winthrop knows *nothing*,' interrupted the Secretary of State with unexpected harshness. 'Robert Winthrop is a brilliant man, but he's never understood the meaning of confrontation except in its most rarefied forms. Bear in mind, Mr Congdon, Scofield killed that intelligence officer from Brussels.'

'Perhaps there were circumstances we're not aware of.'

'Really?' Again the Secretary of State paused, and when he spoke, the meaning behind his words was unmistakable. 'If there *are* such circumstances, I submit we have a far more potentially dangerous situation than any personal feud might engineer. Scofield and Taleniekov know more about the field operations of intelligence services than any two men alive. They must not be permitted to make contact. Either as enemies intent on killing one another, or for those circumstances we know nothing about. Do I make myself clear, Mr Congdon? As director of Consular Operations, it is your responsibility. How you *execute* that responsibility is no concern of mine. You may have a man beyond salvage. That's for you to decide.'

Daniel Congdon remained motionless as he heard the click on the other end of the line. In all his years of service he had never received such an ill-disguised if oblique order. The language could be debated, not the command. He replaced the phone in its cradle and reached for another on the left side of his desk. He pressed a button and dialled three digits.

'Internal Security,' said the male voice answering.

'This is Under-Secretary Congdon. Pick up Brandon Scofield. You have the information. Bring him in at once.'

'One minute, sir,' replied the man politely. 'I think a level-two surveillance entry on Scofield came in a couple of days ago.'

Talenickov and the man from Brussels; that was the connecti they had to examine. Congdon sat forward and reached for the telephone, then stopped. Timing was everything now. The cables

panic. Names could be revealed, men and women tortured, killed, whole networks exposed; no time was to be lost eliminating Beowulf Agate. Word had been relayed by early evening that two men had already been chosen. In Prague and Marseilles; they were in the air now, on their way to Washington, no delays anticipated regarding passports or immigration procedures. A third would be leaving Amsterdam before morning, it was morning now in Amsterdam.

By noon, an execution team totally dissociated from the United States government would be in Washington. Each man had the same telephone number to call, an untraceable phone in the Baltimore ghetto. Whatever information had been gathered on Scofield would be relayed by the person at that number. And only one man could give that information to Baltimore. The man responsible: the director of Consular Operations. No one else in the United States government had the number.

Could one final connection be made? wondered Congdon. There was so little time and it would take extraordinary co-operation. Could that co-operation be requested, even approached. Nothing like it had ever happened. But it could be made, a location might be suggested -

But too much time would be consumed with diplomatic complications, neither side wishing to acknowledge the objective of violence. There was a better way; it was dangerous but infinitely more direct.

Congdon got out of bed quietly, went downstairs and entered the small study that was his office at home. He went to his desk which was bolted into the floor, the lower right-hand drawer concealing a safe with a combination lock. He turned on the lamp

in his line of duty. Taleniev had operated in Washington; there was speculation that he had made a dozen trips or more to the United States within the past decade.

Taleniev and the man from Brussels, that was the connection

stunned the recipients. Covert sources in all three cities had reacted to the news of Scofield's 'unsalvageable' behaviour with some panic. Names could be revealed, men and women tortured killed, whole networks exposed; no time was to be lost eliminating Beowulf Agate. Word had been relayed by early evening that two men had already been chosen in Prague and Marseilles; they were in the air now, on their way to Washington, no delays anticipated regarding passports or immigration procedures. A third would be leaving Amsterdam before morning; it was morning now in Amsterdam.

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Could one final connection be made? wondered Congdon

might be uncovered, a dual execution guaranteed.

He had been about to call the Secretary of State to suggest very unusual, early morning meeting with the Soviet

Congdon got out of bed quietly

He

telephone in the town of Herndon Falls, Virginia. The scanners pick up no evidence of interference but, of course, that could be meaningless.'

'I don't know what other proof to give you . . .'

'You mistake me, Mr Under-Secretary. The fact that you possess this number is not in itself earthshaking; the fact that you have the audacity to use it and ask for me by my code name, perhaps is. I have the proof I need. What is this business between us?'

Congdon told him in as few words as possible. 'You want Talenikov. We want Scofield. The contact ground is Washington. I'm convinced of it. The key to the location is your man from Brussels.'

'If I recall, his body was delivered to the embassy several days ago.'

'Yes.'

'You've connected it with Scofield?'

'Your own ambassador did. He pointed out that the man was part of a KGB section in East Berlin in 1968. Talenikov's unit. There was an incident involving Scofield's wife.'

'I see,' said the Russian. 'So Beowulf Agate still kills for revenge.'

'That's a bit much, isn't it? May I remind you that it would appear Talenikov is coming after Scofield, not the other way around.'

'Be specific, Mr Under-Secretary. Since we agree in principle what do you want from us?'

'It's in your computers, or in a file somewhere. It probably goes back a number of years, but it's there; it would be in ours. We believe that at one time or another the man from Brussels and Talenikov operated in Washington. We need to know the address of the hole. It's the only connection we have between Scofield and Talenikov. We think that's where they'll meet.'

'I see,' repeated the Soviet. 'And presuming there is such an address, or addresses, what would be the position of your government?'

Congdon was prepared for the question.

'No position at all,' he replied in a monotone. 'The information will be relayed to others, men very much concerned about Beowulf Agate's recent behaviour. Outside of myself, no one in my government will be involved.'

'A ciphered cable, identical in substance, was sent to three counter-revolutionary cells in Europe. To Prague, Marseilles

8

Scofield let the cold water run in the basin, leaned against the sink, and looked into the mirror. His eyes were bloodshot from lack of sleep, the stubble of his beard pronounced. He had not shaved in nearly three days, the periods of rest were cumulatively not much more than three hours. It was shortly past four in the morning and no time to consider sleeping or shaving.

Across the hall, Taleniev's well-dressed decoy was getting no more sleep than he was; the telephone calls were coming every fifteen minutes now.

Mr Brandon Scofield, please.

I don't know any Scofield! Stop calling me! Who are you?

A friend of Mr Scofield's. It's urgent that I speak with him.

He's not here! I don't know him. Stop it! You're driving me crazy. I'll tell the hotel not to ring this phone any more!

I wouldn't do that, if I were you. Your friend would not approve. You wouldn't be paid.

Stop it!

Bray's former lover from Paris was doing her job well. She had asked only one question when he had made the request that she keep up the calls.

'Are you in trouble, darling?'

'Yes.'

'Then I'll do as you ask. Tell me what you can, so I'll know what to say.'

and Amsterdam. Such cells can provide killers.'

'I commend you on your interception,' said the Director of *Cons Op*.

'You do the same with us every day. No compliments are called for.'

'You made no move to interfere?'

'Of course not, Mr Under-Secretary. Would you?'

'No.'

'It's eleven o'clock in Moscow. I'll call you back within the hour.'

Congdon hung up and leaned back in the chair. He desperately wanted a drink, but would not give in to the need. For the first time in a long career he was dealing directly with faceless enemies in Moscow. There could be no hint of irresponsibility; he was alone and in that solitary contact with his protection. He closed his eyes and pictured blank walls of white concrete in his mind's eye.

Twenty-two minutes later the phone rang. He sprang forward and picked it up.

'There is a small, exclusive hotel on Nebraska Avenue . . .'

Scofield was about to go back to his cold basin when he heard the commotion; he looked once more through the glass circle.

The well-dressed woman had walked out of the room, her overnight case in her hand. The maid stood in the door passively as the decoy's words were heard plainly.

'Tell him to go to hell!' shouted the woman. He's a fucking nut, dear. This whole goddamn place is filled with nuts!

The maid watched in silence as the woman walked rapidly down the corridor. Then she closed the door, remaining inside.

The matronly-looking maid had been paid well; she would be

The string was drawing tighter, everything was patience now
And staying awake.

Talenickov walked the streets, aware that his legs were close to buckling, struggling to stay alert and avoid colliding with the crowds on the sidewalk. He played mental games to keep his concentration alive, counting footsteps and cracks in the pavement and blocks between telephone booths. The radios could not be used any longer; the citizen-bands were filled with babble. He cursed the fact that there had not been time to purchase more sophisticated equipment. But he never thought it could possibly go on so long! Madness!

It was twenty minutes past eleven in the morning, the city of Washington vibrating, people rushing, automobiles and buses clogging the streets . . . and still the insane telephone calls kept coming to the suite at the Hotel on Nebraska Avenue.

Brandon Scofield, please. It's urgent that I speak with him . . .
Insanity!

What was Scofield doing? Where was he? Where were his intermediaries?

Only the old woman remained in the hotel. The whore had revolted, the two men long since exhausted, their presence mere embarrassing, accomplishing nothing. The woman stayed in the suite, getting what rest she could between the maddening telephone calls, relaying every word spoken by the caller. A female with pronounced 'foreign' accent, probably French, never staying on the line more than ten or twelve seconds, unable to be drawn on

'Don't talk over twenty seconds. I don't know who controls the switchboard.'

'You *are* in trouble.'

Within an hour, or less, the woman across the hall would go into panic and flee the hotel. Whatever she had been promised was not worth the macabre phone calls, the escalating sense of danger. The decoy would be removed; the hunter stymied.

Taleniekov would then be forced to send in his birds and the process would start over again. Only the phone calls would come less frequently, perhaps every hour, just when sleep was settling in. Eventually, the birds would fly away, there being limits as to how long they could stay in the air. The hunter's resources were extensive, but not *that* extensive. He was operating in foreign territory; how many decoys and birds were available to him? He could not go on indefinitely calling blind contacts, setting up hastily summoned meetings, issuing instructions and money.

No, he could not do that. Frustration and exhaustion would converge and the hunter would be alone, at the end of his resources. Finally, he would show himself. He had no choice; he could not leave the drop unattended. It was the only trap he had, the only connection between himself and the quarry.

Sooner or later Taleniekov would walk down the hotel corridor stop at the door of suite 211. When he did, it would be the sight he'd see.

Soviet killer was good, but he was going to lose his life to man he called Beowulf Agate, thought Scofield. He turned off faucet and plunged his face into the cold water.

He pulled up his head; there were sounds of movement in the corridor. He walked to the tiny circular peephole. Across the way, a matronly looking hotel maid was unlocking the door. Draped over her right forearm were several towels and sheets. A maid at four o'clock in the morning? Bray silently acknowledged Taleniekov's imagination; he had hired an all-night maid to be his late-night eyes inside. It was an able move, but flawed. Such an individual was too limited, too easily removed; she could be called away by the front desk. A guest had had an accident, a burning cigarette, an overturned pitcher of water. Too limited. And with a greater flaw.

In the morning she would go off duty. And when she did, she would be summoned by a guest across the hall.

and very abrupt. She was either a professional, or being instructed by a professional; there could be no tracing the number or the location of the calls.

Vasili approached the phone booth fifty yards north of the hotel's entrance on the opposite side of the street. It was the fourth call he had made from this particular booth, and he had memorized the graffiti and the odd numbers scratched on the grey metal of the edge. He walked in, pulled the glass door shut, and inserted a coin; the tone hummed in his ear and he reached for the dial.

Prague!

His eyes were playing tricks on him! Across Nebraska Avenue a man got out of a taxi and stood on the pavement looking down the street towards the hotel. He knew that *man*!

At least, he knew the face. And it was Prague!

The man had a history of violence, both political and non-political. His police record was filled with assaults, theft and unproven homicides, his years in prison nearer ten than five. He had worked against the state more for profit than for ideology; he had been well paid by the Americans. His firing arm was good, his knife better.

That he was in Washington and less than fifty yards from this particular hotel could only mean he had a connection with Scofield. Yet there was no sense in the connection! Beowulf Agate, scores of men and women he could call upon for help in any of cities, but he would not call on someone from Europe, and he certainly would not call on *this* man; the streak of disism was conceivably unmanageable. Why was he here? Who had summoned him?

Who *sent* him? And were there others?

But it was the *why* that burned into Taleniekov's brain. It was profoundly disturbing. Beyond the fact that the Bern-Washington depot had been revealed – undoubtedly, unwittingly by Scofield himself – someone knowing it had reached Prague for a walking gun known to have performed extensively for the Americans.

Why? Who was the target?

Beowulf Agate?

Oh, God! There *was* a method; it had been used before by Washington . . . and strangely enough there was a vague similarity to the ways of the Matarese. *Storm clouds over Washington . . .* Scofield had run into a storm so severe that he had not only been terminated, but conceivably his execution had been ordered.

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'No one over here thinks you are. We assume you stepped on some large Muscovite feet. But can you return?'

'Someday, yes.'

'I can't believe the charges. Yet you're *here*!'

'Because I must be. For Russia's sake, for all our sakes. *Truth* me. I need information quickly. If anyone at the embassy has it, you would.'

'What is it?'

'I've just seen a man from Prague, someone the Americans used for his more violent talents. We kept an extensive file on him; I assume we still keep it. Do you know anything . . .'

'Beowulf Agate,' interrupted the diplomat quietly. 'It's Scofield, isn't it? That's what drives you still.'

'Tell me what you know!'

'Leave it alone, Taleniekov. Leave *him* alone. Leave him to his own people; he's finished.'

'My God, I'm *right*,' said Vasili, his eyes on the coffee shop across Nebraska Avenue.

'I don't know what you think you're right about, but I know . . . planes were intercepted. To Prague, Marseilles and Amsterdam.'

'We sent a team,' broke in Taleniekov.

' . . . away. You have your revenge, the sweetest imaginable. . . . a lifetime, he's taken by his own.'

'It can't happen! There are things you *don't know*.'

'It can happen regardless of what I know. We can't stop it.'

Suddenly, Vasili's attention was drawn to a pedestrian about to cross the intersection not ten yards from the telephone booth. There was something about the man, the set expression of his face, the eyes that darted from side to side behind the lightly tinted glasses – bewildered, perhaps, but not lost, studying his surroundings. And the man's clothes, loose-fitting, inexpensive tweeds, thick and made to last . . . they were French. The glasses were *French*, the man's face itself *Gallic*. He looked across the street towards the marquee of the hotel, and hastened his step.

Marseilles had arrived.

'Come in to us.' The diplomat was speaking. 'Whatever happened cannot be irreparable in light of your extraordinary contributions.' The former comrade from Riga was being persuasive. Too persuasive. It was not in character between professionals. 'The fact that you came in voluntarily will be in your favour.'

Heaven knows, you'll have our support. We'll ascribe your flight to a temporary aberration, a highly emotional state. After all, Scofield killed your brother.'

'I killed his wife.'

'A wife is not blood. These things are understandable. Do the right thing. Come in, Taleniekov.'

The excessive persuasion was now illogical. One did not voluntarily turn oneself in until the evidence of exoneration was more concrete. Not with an order for summary execution on one's head. Perhaps, after all, the former friendship could not stand the strain. 'You'll protect me?' he asked the *pradavyet*.

'Of course.'

A lie. No such protection could be promised. Something was wrong.

Across the street, the man wearing tinted glasses approached the coffee shop. He slowed his pace, then stopped and went up to the window as if studying a menu affixed to the glass. He reached into his pocket, took out a cigarette and lit it. From inside, barely seen in the sunlight, there was a flicker of a match. The Frenchman went inside. Prague and Marseilles had made contact.

'Thank you for your advice,' said Vasili into the phone. 'I'll think it over and call you back.'

'It would be best if you didn't delay,' answered the diplomat in urgency replacing sympathetic persuasion. 'Your situation would not be improved by any involvement with Scofield. You should not be seen down there.'

Seen down there? Taleniekov reacted to the words as though a gun had been fired in front of his face. In his old friend's knowledge was the betrayal! See down *where*? His colleague from Riga knew! The hotel on Nebraska Avenue. Scofield had not exposed the Bern depot - unwittingly or otherwise. *KGB had!* Soviet intelligence was a participant in Beowulf Agate's execution. *Why?*

The Matarese? There was no time to think, only act . . .

Beowulf Agate, no bird could be followed to the target. The target had executed a brilliant manoeuvre; he was in the direct range of fire, but unseen, observing but unobservable.

'You really *must* listen to me, Vasili.' The *pradavyet*'s words came faster now; he obviously sensed indecision. If his former colleague from Riga had to be killed, it could be done any number of ways within the embassy. That was infinitely preferable to a comrade's corpse being found in an American hotel, somehow tied to the murder of an American intelligence officer by foreign agents. Which meant the KGB had revealed the location of the depot to the Americans, but had not known the precise schedule of the execution at the time.

They knew it now. Someone in the State Department had told them, the message clear. His countrymen had to stay away from the hotel – as did the Americans. None could be involved. Vasili had to buy minutes, for minutes might be all he had left. Diversion.

'I'm listening.' Taleniekov's voice was choked with sincerity, an exhausted man coming to his senses. 'You're right. I've nothing to gain now, only everything to lose. I put myself in your hands: If I can find a taxi in this insane traffic, I'll be at the embassy in thirty minutes. Watch for me. I need you.'

Vasili broke the connection, and inserted another coin. He dialled the hotel's number; no second could be wasted.

'He's *here*?' said the old woman incredulously, in response to Taleniekov's statement.

'My guess would be nearby. It would explain the timing, the phone calls, his knowing when someone was in the suite. He can hear sounds through the walls, open a door when he heard someone in the corridor. Are you still in your uniform?'

'Yes. I'm too tired to take it off.'

'Check the surrounding rooms.'

'Good heavens, do you know what you're asking? What if he...'

'I know what I'm paying; there's more if you do it. Do it! There's not a moment to be lost! I'll call you back in five minutes.'

'How will I *know* him?'

'He won't let you into the room.'

Bray sat shirtless between the open window and the door and let the cold air send shivers through his body. He had brought the temperature of the room down to fifty degrees, the chill was necessary to keep him awake. A cold tired man was far more alert than a warm one.

There was the tiny, blunt sound of metal slapping against metal, then the twisting of a knob. Outside in the hallway a door was

something odd about the face . . . but Bray had no time to study it further. In these new circumstances, the negotiations had to begin quickly. He shoved the gun into his shirt, the stiff cloth keeping the bulge to a minimum.

'Yes?' he asked.

'Maid service, sir,' was the reply, spoken in an indeterminate brogue, more guttural than definable. 'The management has asked that all rooms be checked for supplies, sir.'

It was a poor lie, the bird too flawed to think of a better one.

'Come in,' said Scofield, reaching for the latch.

'There's no answer in suite two-eleven,' said the switchboard operator, annoyed by the persistence of the caller.

'Try it *again*,' replied Talenikov, his eyes on the entrance of the coffee shop across the street. 'They may have stepped out for a moment, but they'll be right back. I *know* it. Keep ringing, I'll stay on the line.'

'As you wish, sir,' snapped the operator.

Madness! Nine minutes had passed since the old woman had begun the search, nine minutes to check four doors in the hallway. Even assuming all the rooms were occupied, and a maid had to give explanations to the occupants, nine minutes was far longer than she needed. A fourth conversation would be brief and blunt. *Go away. I am not to be disturbed. Unless . . .*

A match flared in the sunlight, its reflection sharp in the dark glass of the coffee shop window. Vasili blinked and stared; from one of the unseen tables inside there was a corresponding signal, a light glinted quickly.

Amsterdam had arrived; the execution team was complete. Talenikov studied the figure walking towards the small restaurant. He was tall and dressed in a black overcoat, a grey silk muffler around his throat. His hat, too, was grey, and obscured his profile, his features unable to be seen clearly.

The ringing on the telephone was now abrasive. Long sudden bursts resulting from a furious operator punching a switchboard button. There was no answer and Vasili began to think the unthinkable: Beowulf Agate had intercepted his bait. If so, the American was in greater danger than he could imagine. Three men had flown in from Europe to be his executioners, and – no less lethal – a gentle-appearing old woman whom he might try to compromise would kill him the instant she felt cornered. He

ould never know where the shot came from, nor that she even m
ad a weapon.

'I'm sorry, sir!' said the operator angrily. 'There's still no r,
" -- " 'he did not

- It was a desperate tactic, one he would never condone except
as a last-extremity measure, the risk of exposure was too great.
But it was the last extremity and if there were alternatives he was
too exhausted to think of them. Again, he knew only that he had
to act, each decision an instinctive reflex, the shaping of those
instincts trusted. He reached into his pocket for his money and
removed five one-hundred-dollar bills. Then he took out his
passport case, and extracted a letter he had written on an English-
language typewriter five days ago in Moscow. The letterhead was
that of a brokerage house in Bern, Switzerland, it identified the
bearer as one of the firm's partners. One never knew . . .

He walked out of the telephone booth and entered the flow of
pedestrians until he was directly opposite the entrance of the hotel.
He waited for a break in the traffic, then walked rapidly across
Nebraska Avenue.

Two minutes later a solicitous day manager introduced a
Monsieur Blanchard to the operator of the hotel switchboard.
This same manager - as impressed with Monsieur Blanchard's
credentials as he was with the two hundred dollars the Swiss
financier had casually insisted he take for his troubles - dutifully
provided a relief operator while the woman talked alone with the
generous Monsieur Blanchard.

'I ask you to forgive a worried man's rudeness over the tele-
phone,' said Talenuekov, as he pressed three one-hundred-dollar
bills into her nervous hand. 'The ways of international finance can
be appalling in these times. It is a bloodless war, a constant
struggle to prevent unscrupulous men from taking advantage of
honest brokers and legitimate institutions. My company has just
such a problem. There's someone in this hotel . . .'

A minute later, Vasili was reading a master list of telephone
charges, recorded by a mindless computer. He concentrated on
the calls made from the second floor; there were two corridors:
suites 211 and 212 opposite three double rooms in the west wing;
four single rooms on the other side. He studied all charges bills
to telephones 211 through 215. Names would mean nothing; loc

calls were not identified by number; long distance charges were the only items that might provide information. Beowulf Agate had to build a cover and it would not be in Washington. He had killed a man in Washington.

The hotel was, as Talenickov knew, an expensive one. This was further confirmed by the range of calls made by guests who thought nothing of picking up a telephone and calling London as easily as a nearby restaurant. He scanned the sheets, concentrating on the *O.O.T.* areas listed.

- 212 . . . London, U.K. chgs: \$26.50
- 214 . . . Des Moines, Ia. chgs: \$4.75
- 214 . . . Cedar Rapids, Ia. chgs: \$6.20
- 213 . . . Minneapolis, Minn. chgs: \$7.10
- 215 . . . New Orleans, La. chgs: \$11.55
- 214 . . . Denver, Colo. chgs: \$6.75
- 213 . . . Easton, Md. chgs: \$8.05
- 215 . . . Athens, Ga. chgs: \$3.15
- 212 . . . Munich, Germ. chgs: \$41.10
- 213 . . . Easton, Md. chgs: \$4.30
- 212 . . . Stockholm, Swed. chgs: \$38.25

Where was the pattern? Suite 212 had made frequent calls to Europe, but that was too obvious, too dangerous. Scofield would not place such traceable calls. Room 214 was centred in the Mid-west, Room 215 in the South. There was something but he could not pinpoint it. *Something* that triggered a memory.

When he saw it and the memory was activated, clarified. The room without a pattern. Room 213. Two calls to Easton, Maryland, one to Minneapolis, Minnesota. Vasili could see the words in the dossier as if he were reading them. Brandon Scofield had a sister in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Talenickov memorized both numbers in case it was necessary to use them, if there was *time* to use them, to confirm them. He turned to the operator. 'I don't know what to say. You've been most helpful but I don't think there's anything here that will help.'

The switchboard operator had entered into the minor conspiracy, and was enjoying her prominence with the impressive Swiss. 'If you'll note, Monsieur Blanchard, suite two-twelve placed a number of overseas calls.'

'Yes, I see that. Unfortunately, no one in those cities would

have anything to do with the present crisis. Strange, though. Room two-thirteen telephoned Easton, Maryland and Minneapolis. An odd coincidence, but I have friends in both places. However, nothing relevant . . . 'Vasili let his words drift off, inviting comment.

'Just between the two of us, Monsieur Blanchard, I don't think the gentleman in room two-thirteen is all there, if you know what I mean.'

'Oh?

The woman explained. The DND on 213 was a standing order; no one was to disturb the man's privacy. Even room service was instructed to leave the tray tables in the hallway, and maid service was to be suspended until specifically requested. To the best of the operator's knowledge, there had been no such request in three days. Who could live like that?

'Of course, we get people like him all the time. Men who reserve a room so they can stay drunk for hours on end, or get away from their wives or meet other women. But three days without maid service, I think is *sick*.'

'It's hardly fastidious.'

'You see it more and more,' said the woman confidentially. 'Especially in the government, everyone's so harried. But when you think our taxes are *paying* for it - I don't mean *yours*, Monsieur . . .'

'He's in the government?' interrupted Taleniekov.

'Oh, we think so. The night manager wasn't supposed to say anything to *anybody*, but we've been here for years, if you know what I mean.'

'Old friends, of course. What happened?'

'Well, a man came by last evening - actually it was this morning, around five a.m. - and showed the manager a photograph.'

'A picture of the man in two-thirteen?'

The operator glanced around briefly; the door of the office was open, but she could not be overheard. 'Yes. Apparently he's *really sick*. An alcoholic or something, a psychiatric case. No one's to say anything; they don't want to alarm him. A doctor will be coming for him some time today.'

'Some time today? And, of course, the man who showed the photograph identified himself as someone from the government, didn't he? I mean, that's how you learned the guest upstairs was in the government?'

'When you've spent as many years in Washington as we have Monsieur Blanchard, you don't have to ask for identification. It's all over their faces.'

'Yes, I imagine it is. Thank you very much. You've been a great help.'

Vasili left the room quickly and rushed out into the lobby. He had his confirmation. He had found Beowulf Agate.

But others had found him, too. Scofield's executioners were only a few hundred feet away, preparing to close in on the condemned man.

To break into the American's room to warn him would be to invite an exchange of gunfire; one or both would die. To reach him on the telephone would provoke only disbelief; where was the credibility in such an alarm delivered by an enemy one loathed about a *new* enemy one did not know existed.

There had to be a way and it had to be found quickly. If there were only time to send another with something on his person that would explain the truth to Scofield. Something Beowulf Agate would accept . . .

There was no time. Vasili saw the man in the black overcoat walk through the entrance of the hotel.

9

Scofield knew the instant the maid walked through the door what disturbed him about the elderly face. It was the eyes. There was an intelligence behind them beyond that of a plain-spoken domestic who spent her nights cleaning up the soil of pampered hotel guests. She was frightened – or perhaps merely curious – but whichever: neither was born of a blunt mind.

An actress, perhaps?

'Forgive my disturbin' you, sir,' said the woman, noticing his unshaven face and the cold room and heading for the open bathroom door. 'I'll not be a minute.'

An actress. The brogue was an affectation, no roots in Ireland or the Highlands. Too, the walk was light; she did not have the leg muscles of an old woman used to the drudgery of carrying linens and bending over beds. And the hands were white and soft, not those of a woman who had spent years scrubbing floors.

different.

'You've a fresh supply of towels, sir,' said the old woman, coming out of the bathroom and heading for the door. 'I'll be on my way. Sorry for disturbin' you.'

Scofield stopped her with a small gesture. An authentic maid changing towels in a hotel would not have noticed.

'Sir?' asked the woman, her eyes alert.

'Tell me, what part of Ireland do you come from? I can't

place the dialect. County Wicklow, I think.'

'Yes, sir.'

'The south country?'

'Yes, sir; very good, sir,' she said rapidly, her left hand on the doorknob.

'Would you mind leaving me an extra towel? Just put it on the bed.'

'Oh?' The old woman turned, the perplexed expression again on her face. 'Yes, sir, of course.' She started towards the bed.

Bray went to the door and pushed the bolt into place. He spoke as he did so, but gently; there was nothing to be gained by alarming Taleniekov's frightened bird. 'I'd like to talk to you. You see, I watched you last night, at four o'clock this morning to be precise . . .'

A rush of air, the scratching of fabric. Sounds he was familiar with. *Behind him in the room.*

He spun, but not in time. He heard the muted spit and felt a razorlike cut across the skin of his neck. An eruption of blood spread over his left shoulder. He lunged to his right; a second shot followed, the bullet embedding itself in the wall above him. He swung his arm in a violent arc, sending a lamp off a table towards the impossible sight six feet away, in the centre of the room.

The old woman had dropped the towels and in her hand was a gun. Gone was her soft, gentle bewilderment, in its place the calm, determined face of an experienced killer. *He should have known!* He dived to the floor, his fingers gripping the base of the table; spun again to his right, then twisted to his left, lifting the table by its leg like a small battering ram. He rose, crashing forward; two more shots were fired, splintering the wood inches above his head.

He rammed the woman, hammering her back into the wall with such force that a stream of saliva accompanied the expulsion of breath from the snarling lips.

'*Bastard!*' The scream was swallowed as the gun clattered to the floor. Scofield dropped the table, slamming it down on her feet as he reached for the weapon.

He held it, stood up and grabbed the bent-over woman by the hair, yanking her away from the wall. The red wig beneath the ruffled maid's cap came off in his hand, throwing him off balance. From somewhere beneath the uniform, the grey-haired killer had pulled a knife - a thin stiletto. Bray had seen such weapons before;

'How often?'

'Every ten or fifteen minutes. He'll call again soon.'

'Let's go,' said Bray cautiously. 'Move to your right and drop the knife on the bed.'

'Then you'll *shoot*,' whispered the old woman.

'If I was going to, I'd do it now,' said Scofield. He *needed* he needed her confidence. 'There'd be no reason to wait, would there? Let's get over to that phone. Whatever he was paying, I'll double it.'

'I don't think I can walk. I think you broke my foot.'

'I'll help you.' Bray lowered the towel and took a step toward her. He held out his hand. 'Take my arm.'

The old woman placed her left foot in front of her painfully. Then suddenly, like an enraged old lioness, she lunged forward. Her face again contorted, her eyes wild.

The blade came rushing towards Scofield's stomach.

Taleniekov followed the man from Amsterdam into the elevator. There was one other couple in the car. Young, rich, pampered Americans; fashionably dressed lovers or newly-weds, aware only of themselves and their hungers. They had been drinking, the stale odour of wine hanging about them.

The Hollander in the black overcoat removed his grey Hornburg, as Vasili, his face briefly turned away, stood next to him against the panelled wall of the small enclosure. The doors closed. The girl laughed softly; her companion pressed the button for the fourth floor. The man from Amsterdam stepped forward and touched number 2.

As he moved back, he glanced to his left, his eyes making contact with Taleniekov's. The man froze, the shock total, the recognition absolute. And in that shock, that recognition, Vasili saw another truth: the execution trap was meant for him as well. The team had a priority, and it was Beowulf Agate, but if a KGB agent known as Taleniekov appeared on the scene he was to be taken out as ruthlessly as Scofield.

The man from Amsterdam swung his hat in front of his chest, plunging his right hand into his pocket. Vasili rushed him, pinning him against the wall, his left hand gripping the wrist in the pocket, slipping down, separating hand from weapon, groping for the thumb, twisting it back until the bone cracked and the man bleated. He sank to his knees.

The girl screamed. Taleniekov spoke in a loud voice. He addressed the couple.

'You will not be harmed. I repeat, you will not be harmed if you do as I say. Make no noise, and take us to your room.'

The Hollander lurched to the right; Vasili slammed his knee into the man's face, vicing the head against the wall. He took his gun from his pocket and held it up, pointing at the ceiling.

'I will not use this. I *will not* use this unless you disobey. You're no part of our dispute and I don't want you harmed. But you must do as I say.'

'*Jesus! Jesus Christ! . . .*' The young man's lips trembled.

'Take out your key,' ordered Taleniekov almost amiably. 'When the doors open walk casually in front of us to your room. You will be perfectly safe if you do as I say. If you don't, if you cry out, or try to raise an alarm, I shall have to shoot. I won't kill you; instead, I'll fire into your spines. You'll be paralysed for life.'

'Oh, *Christ, please! . . .*' The young man's trembling spread throughout his head, neck and shoulders.

'*Please,* mister! We'll do whatever you say!' The girl at least was lucid; she took the key from her lover's pocket.

'Get up!' said Vasili to the man from Amsterdam. He reached into the killer's overcoat pocket and removed the Hollander's weapon.

The elevator doors opened. The couple walked out stiffly, passing an elderly man reading a newspaper, and turned right down the corridor. Taleniekov, his Graz-Burya concealed at his side, gripped the cloth of Amsterdam's overcoat, propelling him forward.

'One sound, Dutchman,' he whispered. 'And you'll not make another. I'll blow your back away; you won't have time to scream.'

Inside the double room, Vasili shoved the Hollander into a chair, held his gun on him, and issued orders once again to the frightened couple. 'Get inside that clothes closet. *Quickly!*'

Tears were streaming down the young man's pampered face. The girl pushed him into their dark, temporary cell. Taleniekov propped a chair underneath the knob and kicked it until it was wedged firmly between the metal and the rug. He turned to the Hollander.

'You have exactly five seconds to explain how it's to be done,

face.

'You'll have to be clearer,' came the professional reply.

'By all means,' Vasili slashed the barrel of the Graz-Burya downward, ripping the flesh of the assassin's face. Blood spread; the man raised his hands. Taleniekov bent over the chair and cracked both wrists in rapid succession. 'Don't touch! We've just begun. Drink it! Soon you'll have no lips. Then no teeth, no chin, no cheekbones! Finally, I'll take your eyes. Have you ever seen a man like that? The face is a terrible source of pain, puncturing the eyes unendurable.' Vasili struck again, now arching upwards, catching the man's nostrils in the swing.

'No . . . *No!* I followed *orders!*'

'Where have I heard that before?' Taleniekov raised the weapon; again the hands were raised and again they were repulsed with blows. 'What *are* those orders, Dutchman? There are three of you and the five seconds have passed! We must be serious now.' He tapped the barrel of the Graz-Burya harshly over the Hollander's left eye, then the right. 'No more time!' He pulled the weapon back, then shoved it knifelike into Amsterdam's throat.

'*Stop!*' screamed the man, his air cut off, the word garbled. 'I'll tell you . . . He betrays us, he takes money for our names. He's sold out to our enemies!'

'No judgements. The *orders!*'

'He's never seen me. I'm to draw him out.'

'*How?*'

'*You.* I've come to warn him. You're on your way.'

'He'd reject you. Kill you! A transparent device. How did you know the room?'

'We have a photograph.'

'Of *him*. Not of me.'

'Both of you, actually. But I show him only his. The night manager identified him.'

'Who gave you this photograph?'

'Friends from Prague, operating in Washington, with ties to the Soviet. Former friends of Beowulf Agate who know what he's done.'

Taleniekov stared at the man from Amsterdam. He was telling the truth, because the explanation was based on partial truth. Scofield would look for flaws, but he would not reject Amsterdam's words; he could not afford that luxury. He would take the

under normal circumstances a meaningless scratch, but not with this blade. He aimed the gun at her head and squeezed the trigger; there was nothing but the click of the firing pin.

He lashed his right foot, catching her between her breast and armpit, staggering her for an instant, but only an instant. She was wild, clutching the knife as if it were her passport to life; if he touched him, she was free. She crouched, swinging her left arm in front of her, covering the blade that worked furiously in her right. He jumped back, looking for something, *anything* he could use to parry her lunges.

Why had she delayed before? Why had she suddenly stopped and spoken with him, telling him *things* that would make him think? Then he knew. The old hawk was not only vicious, but wise; she knew when she had to restore dissipated strength, knowing she could do it only by engaging her enemy, lulling him, waiting for the unguarded instant . . . one *touch* of the coated blade.

She lunged again, the knife arcing up from the floor towards his legs. He kicked; she whipped the blade back, then slashed laterally, missing the kneecap by centimetres. As her arm swung left with the slash, he caught her shoulder with his right foot and hammered her backwards.

She fell; he grabbed the nearest upright object – a floor lamp with a heavy brass base – hurling it down at her as he kicked again at the hand that held the stiletto.

Her wrist was bent; the point of the blade pierced the fabric of her maid's uniform, entering the flesh above her left breast.

What followed was a sight he did not care to remember. The old woman's eyes grew wide and thyroid, her lips stretched into a macabre, horrible grin that was no smile. She began to writhe on the floor, her body convulsed and trembling. She rolled into a foetal position, pulling her thin legs into her stomach, the agony complete. Prolonged, muffled screams came from her throat; she rolled again, clawing the rug; mucus disgorged from her convoluted mouth, a swollen tongue blocking passage.

Suddenly there was a horrible gasp and a final expulsion of breath. Her body jerked off the floor spastically; it became rigid. Her eyes were open wide, staring at nothing, her lips parted in death. The process had taken less than sixty seconds.

Bray leaned over and lifted the hand, separating the bones from the fingers. He removed the knife, stood up and walked to the bureau where there was a book of matches. He struck one and held

under the blade. There was an eruption of flame, spitting so high that it singed his hair, the heat so intense it burned his face. He dropped the stiletto, stamping the fire out under his foot.

The phone rang.

'This is Taleniekov,' said the Russian into the silence of the telephone. It had been picked up but there was no voice on the line. 'I submit that your position is not lessened by acknowledging our contact.'

'Acknowledged,' was the one-word reply.

'You reject my cable, my white flag, and were I you, I would do the same. But you're wrong and I would be wrong! I swore I'd kill you, Beowulf Agate, and perhaps one day I will, but not now and not *this* way. I am no schoolboy who proclaims victory before going on to the rugby field. It's not a logical way of doing things in our business. I think that's a reasonable statement.'

'You read my cipher,' was the answer, delivered in a monotone. 'You killed my wife. Come and get me. I'm ready for you.'

'Stop it! We both killed. You took a *brother* . . . and before that, an innocent young girl who knew only slogans! No threat to the animals who raped her and killed her!'

'What?'

'There's no time! There are men who want to kill you, but I'm not one of them!'

wer

... to have provoked her; it was *not* planned! But we waste seconds and you don't have them. Listen to the man I put on the phone. He's from Amsterdam. His face is damaged and he can't see very well, but he can speak.' Vasili pressed the telephone against the Hollander's bloody lips and shoved the Graz-Burya into his neck. 'Tell him, Dutchman!'

'Cables were sent . . .' The injured man whined in fear and blood. . . . was beyond sal . . . made the usua . . . precautions, b . . . what they meant. Don't take precautions, take out the problem, eliminate Beowulf ourselves . . . None of this is new to you, Herr Scofield. You have given such orders; you know they must be carried out.'

Taleniekov yanked the phone away while keeping the barrel

his weapon pressed against Amsterdam's neck. 'You heard it. The trap you set for me is being used to ambush *you*. By your own people.'

Silence. Beowulf Agate said nothing. Vasili's patience was running out. 'Don't you *understand*? They've exchanged information, it's the only way they could have found the depot - what you call a "drop". Moscow *provided* it, can't you *see* that? Each of us is being used as the reason to execute the other, to kill us *both*. My people are more direct than yours. The order for my death has been sent to every Soviet station, civilian and military. Your State Department does it somewhat differently, the analysts take no responsibility for such unconstitutional decisions. They simply send warnings to those who care little for abstractions, but deeply for their lives.'

Silence. Talenickov exploded.

'What more do you *want*? Amsterdam was to draw you out; you would have had no choice. You would have tried to position yourself in one of two exits: the service area or the staircase. At this moment, Marseilles is by the service elevator, Prague on the staircase. The man from Prague is one you know well, Beowulf. You've employed his gun and his knife on many occasions. He's waiting for you. In less than fifteen minutes, if you do not appear in either place, they will take you in your room. What more *do* you want?'

Scofield answered at last. 'I want to know why you're telling me *this*.'

'Re-read my cipher to you! This isn't the first time you and I've been used. An incredible thing is happening and it goes beyond you and me. A few men know about it. In Washington *and* Moscow. But they say nothing; no one can say anything. The admissions are catastrophic.'

'What admissions?'

'The hiring of assassins. On both sides. It goes back years, *decades*.'

'How does it concern me? I don't care about you.'

'Dimitri Yurievich.'

'What about him?'

'They said you killed him.'

'You're lying, Talenickov. I thought you'd be better at it. Yurievich was leaning, he was a probable. The civilian killed was my contact, under *my* source-control. It was a KGB operation.'

Agate that he had done what he could, but it was not true. He knelt down and tore off the black overcoat from Amsterdam's unconscious body.

Bray replaced the phone, his mind was working. If he'd only had sleep, or if he had not gone through the totally unexpected violence of the old woman's attack, or if Taleniekov had not told him so much of the truth, things would be clearer. But it had all happened and, as he had done so often in the past, he had to shift into a state of blind acceptance and think in terms of immediate purpose.

It was not the first time he had been the target of factions distinct from each other. One got used to it when dealing with opposing partisans from the same broad-based camps, although killing was rarely the objective. What was unusual was the timing, the converging of separate assaults. Yet it was so understandable, so clear.

Under-Secretary of State Daniel Congdon had really done it! The seemingly bloodless desk-man had found the courage of his own convictions. More specifically, he had found Taleniekov and Taleniekov's moves towards Beowulf Agate. What better reasoning existed for breaking the rules and eliminating a terminated specialist he considered dangerous? What better motive for reaching the Soviets, who could only favour the dispatch of both

So well orchestrated he or Taleniekov might have been the strategy. Denials and astonishment would go hand in hand; statesmen in Washington and Moscow decrying the actions of former intelligence officers - from another era. An era when personal animosities often superseded national interests. In the end, he could hear the pronouncement, couched in sanctimonious platitudes made by men like Congdon who concealed their filthy decisions under respectable titles.

The infuriating thing was that the reality supported the platitudes, the words were validated by Taleniekov's hunt for revenge. *I swore I'd kill you, Beowulf Agate, and perhaps one day I will.*

That day was today, the *perhaps* without meaning for the Russian. Taleniekov wanted Beowulf Agate for himself; he would brook no interference from killers recruited and programmed by desk-men in Washington and Moscow. *I will see you take your last breath...* Those were Taleniekov's words six years ago; he meant

them then and he meant them now.

Certainly he would save his enemy from the guns of Marseille and Prague. His enemy was worthy of a better gun, *his* gun. And no ploy was too unreasonable, no words too extreme, to bring his enemy into that gunsight.

He was tired of it all, thought Scofield, taking his hand away from the phone. Tired of the tension of move and countermove. In the final analysis, who cared? The crisis was that of a non-event. Who gave a goddamn for two ageing *specialists*, dedicated to the proposition that each's counterpart should die?

Bray closed his eyes, pressing his lids together, aware that there was moisture in his sockets. Tears of fatigue, mind and body spent; it was no time to acknowledge exhaustion. Because he *cared*. If he had to die – and it was always an around-the-corner possibility – he was not going to be taken by guns from Marseille, Prague or Moscow. He was better than that; he had always *been* better.

According to Taleniekov he had eleven minutes; two had passed since the Russian had made the statement. The trap was his room and if the man from Prague was the one Taleniekov had described, the attack would be made quickly, with a minimum of risk. Gas-filled pellets would precede any use of weapons, the fumes immobilizing anyone in the room. It was a tactic favoured by the killer from Prague, he took few gambles.

The immediate objective, therefore, was to get out of the trap. Walking in the corridor was not feasible, perhaps not even opening the door. Since it was Amsterdam's function to draw him out, and he had not been drawn, Prague and Marseille would close in. If there was no one in the hallway – as the absence of sound indicated – they had nothing to lose. Their schedule would not be postponed but it could be accelerated.

No one in the hallway . . . *someone* in the hallway. People milling around, excited, creating a diversion. Most of the time a crowd was to the killers' advantage, not the target's, especially if the target was identifiable and one or more of the killers were not. On the other hand, a target who knew precisely when and where the attack was to be made, could use a crowd to cover his run from ground-zero. An escape based on confusion and a change of appearance. The change did not have to be much, just enough to cause indecision; indiscriminate gunfire during an exit to be avoided.

Eight minutes. Or less. Everything was preparation. He would have his essential belongings, for when he began running, he would have to keep running; how long and how far there was no way to tell, nor could he think about that now. He had to get out of the trap and elude three men who wanted him dead, one more dangerous than the other two for he was not sent by Washington or Moscow. He had come himself.

Bray crossed rapidly to the dead woman on the floor, dragged her to the bathroom, rolled the corpse inside, and closed the door. He picked up the heavy-based lamp and smashed it down on the knob; the lock was jammed, the door could be opened only by breaking it down.

His clothes could be left behind. There were no laundry marks or overt evidence connecting them immediately to Brandon Scofield; fingerprints would do that, but lifting and processing them would take time. He would be far away by then – if he got out of the hotel alive. His attache case was something else; it contained too many tools of his profession. He closed it, spun the combination lock, and threw it on the bed. He put on his jacket and went back to the telephone. He picked it up and dialled the operator.

'This is room two-thirteen,' he said in a whisper, effortlessly made to sound weak. 'I don't want to alarm you, but I know the symptoms. I've had a stroke. I need help . . .'

He let the phone crash against the table and drop to the floor.

10

Taleniekov put on the black overcoat and reached down for the grey scarf, still draped around Amsterdam's neck. He yanked it off, wound it around his throat and picked up the grey hat which had fallen beside the chair. It was too large; he creased the crown so it covered his head less awkwardly, and started for the door, passing the closet. He spoke firmly to the couple within.

'Remain where you are and make no sound! I shall be outside in the corridor. If I hear noise, I'll come back and you'll be the worse for it.'

In the hall, he ran towards the main elevators, and then beyond them, to the plain dark elevator at the end of the corridor. Against the wall was a tray table used by room service. He removed his Graz-Burya from his belt, shoved it in his overcoat pocket and pushed the button with his left hand. The red light went on above the door; the elevator was on the second floor. Marseilles was in position, waiting for Beowulf Agate.

The light went off and seconds later the number 3 shone brightly, then number 4. Vasili turned around, his back to the sliding panel.

The door opened, but there were no words of recognition, no surprise expressed at the sight of the black overcoat or the grey hat. Taleniekov spun around, his finger on the trigger of his gun.

There was no one inside the elevator. He stepped in and pressed the button for the second floor.

'Sir? Sir? My God, it's the crazy one in two-thirteen!' The

excited voice of the operator floated up piercingly from the telephone on the rug. 'Send up a couple of boys! See what they can do! I'll call an ambulance. He's had an attack or something . . .'

The words were cut off; the chaos had begun.

Scofield stood by the door, unlatched it and waited. No more than forty seconds passed when he heard the racing footsteps and the shouts in the corridor. The door burst open; the bell captain ran in, followed by a younger, larger man, a bellboy.

'Thank Christ it wasn't locked! *Where?* . . .'

Bray kicked the door shut, revealing himself to the two men. In his hand was his automatic. 'No one's going to get hurt,' he said calmly. 'Just do exactly as I tell you. You,' Bray ordered the younger man, 'take off your jacket and your cap. And you,' he continued, speaking to the bell captain, 'get on the phone and tell the operator to send up the manager. You're scared; you don't want to touch anything, there may have been trouble up here. You think I'm dead.'

The older man stuttered, his eyes riveted on the gun, then ran to the phone. The performance was convincing, he was frightened out of his wits. He delivered the message almost verbatim.

Bray took the maroon and gold-striped jacket held out for him by the large subordinate. He removed his coat and put it on, bunching his own under his arm. 'The *cap*,' demanded Scofield. It was given.

The bell captain finished, his eyes staring wildly at Bray, his plea screamed! 'For Christ's sake, *hurry!* Get someone up here!'

Scofield gestured with his weapon. 'Stand by the door next to me,' he said to the frantic man, then addressed the younger. 'There's a closet over there beyond the bed. Get inside. *Now!*'

The large, dense bellboy hesitated, looked at Bray's face, and retreated quickly into the closet. Scofield, his weapon pointed at the bell captain, took the necessary steps towards the closet and kicked the door shut. He spoke while picking up the heavy-based lamp by its stem. 'Get over to your right! Do you understand? Answer me!'

'Yeah,' was the muffled reply from inside.

'Knock on the door!'

The tap came from the extreme left, the young man's right. Bray crashed the base of the lamp down on the knob; it broke off. Then he raised his gun, its silencer attached, and fired one shot

A pair of hinged metal doors opened into the second-floor corridor, round windows in the centre of each panel. Vasil approached and peered through the right circle.

There he was. The figure in the heavy tweed suit was edging his way along the wall towards the corner of the intersecting hallway that led to room 213. Taleniev looked at his watch; it was 12.34. Four minutes until the attack; a lifetime if Scofield kept his head about him. A diversion was needed; fire was the surest. A telephone call, a flaming pillow case stuffed with cloth and paper thrown into the hallway. He wondered if Beowulf Agate had thought of it.

Scofield had thought of *something*. Down the hall the light above one of the two main elevators went on; the door opened and three men rushed out talking frantically. One was the manager now close to panic; another man carried a black bag: a doctor. The third, was burly, his face set, the hair close-cropped . . . the hotel's private police officer.

They raced past the startled Marseilles - who turned abruptly away - and proceeded down the long corridor that led to Scofield's room. The Frenchman reached into his pocket and took out a gun.

At the other end of the hallway, below a red *Exit* sign, a heavy door with a crash bar was pulled back. The figure of Prague stepped out, nodding at Marseilles. In his right was a long-barrelled, heavy-calibre automatic, in his left what looked like . . . *was . . . a grenade*. The thumb was curved, pressing on the lever. The firing pin was out!

And if he had one grenade he had more than one. Prague was an arsenal. He would take whoever was in the area, as long as he took Beowulf Agate. A grenade hurled into a dead-end corridor, a swift race into the carnage before the smoke had cleared to push bullets into the heads of those surviving, making sure Scofield was the first. No matter what the American had thought of, he was cornered. There was no way out through the gauntlet.

Unless Prague could be stopped where he was, the grenade exploding beneath him. Vasili pulled the *Graz-Burya* from his pocket and pushed the swinging door in front of him.

He was about to shout when he heard the scream . . . screams from a man in panic.

'Get out of here! For Christ's sake, I've got to get out of here!'

What followed was madness. Two men in hotel uniforms came running out of the corridor, one turning right, crashing into

ground. But it was a high ground from which he could not see and time was running out. He thought briefly of approaching the cleaning woman, using her as a point somehow, but his appearance ruled it out. His appearance ruled out a great many things, shaving had been a luxury he could not afford, relieving himself precious moments given up, away from the sounds of the trap. The little things became so ominous, so all-important during the waiting games. And he was so tired.

Using the service elevator had to be ruled out; it was an enclosure too easily immobilized, isolated. The staircase was not much better, but he had an advantage; except for a roof - if there was an exit for the roof - it did not go higher. The sight-lines favoured the one above. Birds of prey swooped, they rarely attacked from below.

Sharks did, however.

Diversion. Any kind of diversion. Sharks were known to lunge up at inanimate objects, floating debris.

Bray walked rapidly towards the heavy door to the staircase, stopping briefly at the cleaning woman's cart. He removed four glass ashtrays, stuffing them into his pockets, and wedged the attaché case between his arm and chest.

As quietly as he could, he pressed on the crash bar: the door

which means exposing part of you. A superficial wound means nothing if it saves your life.

The seconds ticked off; there was no alternative.

Bray took out the two remaining ashtrays from his pocket and hurled them over the open space above the railing: He stepped down, and at the first sound of shattering glass, swung out his left arm and shoulder, jabbing the air, arcing in a half-circle, part of him in the Russian's direct line of fire. But not his weapon; it was ready for his own attack.

Two deafening explosions filled the vertical tunnel . . .

The gun was blown out of his hand! Out of his *right hand*! He watched helplessly as the weapon sprang out of his fingers, specks of blood spreading over his palm, the high-pitched ring of still-ricocheting bullet bouncing from steel to steel.

He had been disarmed by a misplaced shot. Killed by an echo.

The Browning automatic clattered down the staircase. He dived for it, yet even as he did so he knew it was too late. The killer below came into view, struggling to his feet, the large barrel of his gun rising, directed at Scofield's head.

It was not Taleniekov, not the face in a thousand photographs, the face he had hated for a decade! It was the man from Prague, a man he had used so often in the cause of free-thinking people. That man was going to kill him now.

Two thoughts came rapidly, one upon the other. Final summations, as it were. His death would come quickly; he was grateful for that. And, at the last, he had deprived Taleniekov of his trophy. 'We all do our jobs,' said the man from Prague, his three fingers tightening on the handle of the gun. 'You taught me that, Beowulf.'

'You'll never get out of here.'

'You forget your own lessons. "Drop your weapons, leave with the crowds." I'll get out. But you won't. If you did, too many would die.'

'*Padazdit!*' The voice thundered from above, no crash of a door preceding it, the man who roared having intruded swiftly, silently. The executioner from Prague spun to his left, ducking, swinging his powerful gun up the stairs at Vasili Taleniekov.

The Russian fired one shot, drilling a hole in Prague's forehead. The Czech fell across Scofield as Bray lunged for his gun, grabbing it off the step, rolling furiously down around the bend in the staircase. He fired wildly at the KGB man; he would not permit

Scofield had begun to find his mind again, the sheer movement forcing him to send impulses to his arms and legs. The Russian had torn a silk scarf apart, wrapping one half around Bray's head, the other around his throat. The bleeding had not stopped, but it was contained. He had found part of his mind, but there was still no clarity in what was happening.

'You saved my life. I want to know *why!*'

'Keep your voice down!' whispered the KGB man. 'And keep moving.'

'I want an answer!'

'I gave it to you.'

'You weren't convincing.'

'You and I, we live only with lies. We see nothing else.'

'From you I expect nothing else.'

'In a few minutes you can make your determination. I give you that.'

'What do you mean?'

'We'll reach the end of the duct; there is a transom ten or twelve feet from the floor. In a rooftop storage area. Once down I can get us out on the street, but every second counts. Should there be people in the vicinity of the transom, they must be frightened away. Gunshots will do it; fire above their heads.'

'What?'

'Yes. I'll give you your gun back.'

'You killed my wife.'

'You killed my brother. Before that your Army of Occupation returned the corpse of a young girl – a child – I loved very much. What came back was not pleasant.'

'I don't know anything about that.'

'Now you do. Make your determination.'

The metal-webbed transom was perhaps four feet wide. Below was a huge, dimly lit room that served as a miniature warehouse filled with crates and boxes of supplies. There was no one in sight. Talenickov handed Scofield the automatic, and began forcing the metal screen from its brackets with his shoulder. It sprang loose and fell crashing to the cement floor. The Russian waited several moments for a response to the noise; there was none.

He turned his body around and, legs first, began sliding out of the duct. His shoulders and head passed over the rim, his fingers gripping the edge; he was finding his balance, prepared for the drop to the floor.

11

The cabin was in the backwoods of Maryland, on the banks of the Patuxent River, fields on three sides, water below. It was isolated, no other houses within a mile in any direction, accessible only by a primitive dirt road over which no taxi would venture. None was asked to do so.

Instead, Bray telephoned a man at the Iranian Embassy, an unregistered Savak agent into hard drugs and exchange students whose exposure would be embarrassing to a benevolent Shah. A rented car was left for them in a metered parking lot on K Street. The keys under the floor mat.

The cabin belonged to a professor of Political Science at Georgetown, a closet homosexual Scofield had befriended years ago when he had torn up a fragment of a dossier that had nothing to do with the man's ability to evaluate classified data for the State Department. Bray had used the cabin a number of times during his recalls to Washington, always when he wished to be beyond reach of the desk-men, usually with a woman. A phone call to the professor was all that it took; no questions were asked, the location of the house key was given. This afternoon it was nailed beneath the second shingle from the right on the front roof. Bray got it by using a ladder propped against a near-by tree.

Inside, the decor was properly rustic; heavy beams and spartan furniture relieved by a profusion of quilted cushions, white walls and red-checked curtains. Flanking the stone fireplace were

'You have nothing to fear from me.'

'I never did,' Bray said.

Scofield heard faint, sharp crackling sounds and spun under the sheets, his hand gripping the Browning automatic by his knees. He raised it between the covers as his feet shot out over the side of the bed; he was prepared to crouch and fire.

There was no one in the room. Moonlight streamed through the north window, shafts of colourless white light separated by the thick panes into single streaks of suspended, eerie illumination. For a moment he was not sure where he was, so complete had been his exhaustion, so deep his sleep. He knew by the time his feet touched the floor; his enemy was in the next room. A very strange enemy who had saved his life, and whose life he had saved minutes later.

Bray looked at the luminous dial of his watch. It was quarter past four in the morning. He had slept nearly thirteen hours, the heavy weight of his arms and legs, the adhesive moisture in his eyes, and the dryness of his throat evidence of having moved very little during that time. He sat for a while on the side of the bed, breathing the cold air deeply, putting the gun down and shaking his hands, slapping his fingers together. He looked over at the locked door of the bedroom.

Taleniekov was up and had started a fire, the sharp crackling was now the unmistakable sound of burning wood. Scofield decided to put off seeing the Russian for a few more minutes. His itched, the growth of his beard so uncomfortable it had used the beginning of a rash on his neck. There was always shaving equipment in the bathroom; he would afford himself the luxury of a shave and change the bandages he had placed on his neck and skull fourteen hours ago. It would postpone for a bit longer his talk with the former - defected? - KGB man. Whatever it concerned, Bray wanted no part of it, yet the unexpected events and decisions of the past twenty-four hours told him he was already involved. The bullet graze on his neck stung, the pain in his head a numbing throb.

It was 4.37 when he unlocked the door and opened it. Taleniekov was standing in front of the fire, sipping from a cup in his hand. 'I apologize if the fire awakened you,' the Russian said. 'Or the sound of the front door - if you heard it.'

'The heater went out,' said Scofield, looking down at the

'Aleksie Krupsky. The name is meaningless, I realize, so I'll explain.'

'Meaningless?' interrupted Scofield, crossing to an armchair in front of the fire, and sitting down. 'Not entirely: Krupsky, the white cat of *Krivoi Rog. Istrebitel*. The last of the exterminators from Section Nine, KGB. The original Nine, of course.'

'You do your school work well, but then, as they say, you're a Harvard man.'

'That kind of schoolwork can be helpful. Krupsky was banished twenty years ago. He became a non-person. If he were alive, I figured he was vegetating in Grasnov, not a consultant being fed information by people in the Kremlin. I don't believe your story.'

'Believe it now,' said Taleniekov, sitting down opposite Bray. 'Because it was not "people" in the Kremlin, just one man. His son. For thirty years one of the highest-ranking survivors of the Politburo. For the past six, Premier of Soviet Russia.'

Scofield put his cup down on the floor and again studied the KGB man's face. It was the face of a practised liar, a professional liar, but not a liar by nature. He was not lying now. 'Krupsky's son the Premier? That's . . . a shock.'

'As it was to me, but not so shocking when you think about it. Guided at every turn, protected by his father's extensive collection of . . . shall we say memorabilia. Hypothetically, it could have happened here. Suppose your late John Edgar Hoover had a politically ambitious son. Who could have stood in his way? Hoover's secret files would have paved any road, even the floors to the Oval Office. The landscape is different, but the trees are the same genus. They haven't varied much since the Romans gave Rome to Caligula.'

'What did Krupsky tell you?'

'The past first. There were things I could not believe, until I spoke of them to several retired leaders of the Politburo. One frightened old man confirmed them, the others caused a plan to be mounted that called for my execution.'

'Your . . . ?'

'Yes. Vasili Vasilievich Taleniekov, master strategist, KGB. An irascible man who may have seen his best years, but whose knowledge could be called upon for several decades perhaps - from a farm in Grasnov. We are a practical people; that would have been the practical solution. In spite of the minor doubts we all have, I believed that; I knew it was my future. But not after I

convinced both sides had gone too far. He didn't trust the maniacs. It was a probe; we weren't sure where we were going.'

'Are you aware that General Blackburn, who was nearly destroyed by the war in Korea, did what no Chairman of the Joint Chiefs has ever done in your history? He met secretly with your potential enemies. In Sweden, in the city of Skellefteå on the Gulf of Bothnia, travelling under cover as a tourist. It was our judgement that he would go to any lengths to avoid the repetition of pointless slaughter. He abhorred conventional warfare, and he did not believe nuclear weapons would ever be used.' The Russian stopped and leaned forward. 'Two men who believed deeply and passionately, in the rejection of human sacrifice, who sought accommodation -- both killed by the Matarese. So perhaps testing was only a part of the exercise. There could well have been another to eliminate powerful men who believed in stability.'

At first Scofield did not reply; the information about Blackburn was astonishing. 'In the testing then, they pointed at me with Yurievich ...'

'And at me with Blackburn,' completed Taleniekov. 'A Browning Magnum, Grade Four, was used to kill Yurievich; a Graz-Bulya for Blackburn.'

'And both of us set up for execution.'

'Exactly,' said the Soviet. 'Because above all men in either country's intelligence service, we cannot be permitted to live. That will never change because we cannot change. Krupsky was right: we are diversions; we will be used and killed. We are too dangerous.'

'Why do they think so?'

'They've studied us. They know we could no more accept the Matarese than we do the maniacs within our own branches. We are dead men, Scofield.'

'Speak for yourself!' Bray was suddenly angry. 'I'm out, terminated, *finished!* I don't give a Goddamn what happens out there! Don't you make judgements about me!'

'They've already been made. By others.'

'Because *you* say so?' Scofield got up, putting the coffee down, his hand not far from the Browning in his belt.

'Because I *believed* the man who told me. It's why I'm *here*, why I *saved* your life and did not take it myself.'

'I have to wonder about that, don't I?'

'What?'

'Everything timed, even to your knowing where Prague was on the staircase.'

'I killed a man who had you under his gun!'

'Prague?' A minor sacrifice. I'm a terminated encyclopaedia. I have no proof my government reached Moscow, only possible conclusions based on what *you* told me. Maybe I'm missing the obvious, maybe the great Taleniekov is eating a little temporary crow to bring in Beowulf Agate.'

'Damn you, Scofield!' roared the KGB man, springing up from the chair. 'I should have let you die! Hear me clearly. What you suggest is unthinkable and the KGB knows it. My feelings run too deep. I'd never bring you in. I'd kill you first.'

Bray stared at the Russian, the honesty of Taleniekov's statement so clear. 'I believe you,' said Scofield, nodding, his anger diminishing in weariness. 'But it doesn't change anything. I don't care. I really don't give a Goddamn . . . I'm not even sure I want to kill you any more. I just want to be left alone.' Bray turned away. 'Take the keys to the car and get out of here. Consider yourself . . . alive.'

'Thank you for your generosity, Beowulf, but I'm afraid it's too late.'

'What?' Scofield turned back to the Soviet

'I did not finish. A man was caught, chemicals administered. There is a timetable, two months, three at the outside. The words were: "Moscow by assassination, Washington by purchase - murder, if necessary." When it happens, neither you nor I will survive. They'll track us to the ends of the earth.'

'Wait a minute,' said Bray, furious. 'Are you telling me that your people *have* a man?'

'Had,' interrupted Taleniekov. 'Cyanide was implanted under his skin; he reached it.'

'But he was *heard*. He was taped, recorded. His words were there!'

'Heard. Not taped, not recorded. And only by one man - who was warned by his father not to permit anyone else to *hear*.'

'The Premier?'

'Yes.'

'Then he knows!'

'Yes, he knows. And all he can do is try to protect his nothing particularly new in his position - but he can't *pretend*. For to speak of it, as Krupsky said, is to acknowledge it.'

This is the age of conspiracy, Scofield. Who cares to bring up past contracts? In my country there are a number of unexplained corpses; you're not so different over here. The Kennedys, Martin Luther King; perhaps most stunning, Franklin Roosevelt. We could all be at each other's throats – more precisely on the nuclear buttons – if our combined pasts were revealed. What would you do, if you were the Premier?

'Protect myself,' said Bray softly. 'Oh, my God . . .'

'Now do you see?'

'I don't want to. I *really* don't want to. I'm out!'

'I submit that you cannot be. Nor I. The proof was yesterday on Nebraska Avenue. We're marked; they want us. They convinced others to have us killed – for the wrong reasons – but they were behind the strategy. Can you doubt it?'

'I wish I could. The manipulators are always easiest to manipulate, con-men the biggest suckers. Jesus!' Scofield walked to the stove to pour himself more coffee. Suddenly, he was struck by something not said, unclear. 'I don't understand. From what little's known about the Matarese, it started as a cult and evolved into a business. It accepted contracts – or *supposedly* accepted contracts – on the basis of feasibility and price. It killed for money; it was never interested in power, *per se*. Why is it interested now?'

'I don't know,' said the KGB man. 'Neither did Krupsky. He was dying and not very lucid, but he said the answer might be in Corsica.'

'Corsica? Why?'

'It's where it all began.'

'Not where it *is*. If it is. The word was that the Matarese moved out of Corsica in the mid-'thirties. Contracts were negotiated as far away as London, New York . . . even Berlin. Centres of international traffic.'

'Then perhaps clues to an answer is more appropriate. The council of the Matarese was formed in Corsica, only one name ever revealed. Guillaume de Matarese. Who were the others? Where did they go? Who are they *now*?'

'There's a quicker way of finding out than going to Corsica. If the Matarese is even a whisper in Washington, there's one person who can track it down. He's the one I was going to call anyway. I wanted my life straightened out.'

'Who is he?'

perhaps too much to drink. He's a cold fellow, that Congdon, and afraid he angered me. After all you've been through to have so little trust . . . I rather sardonically mentioned what you've just described - not that I ever dreamed he would consider such a thing, just that I was appalled at his attitude. So I *can't* believe it. Don't you see? He'd know I'd recognize it. He wouldn't take that risk.'

'Then someone gave him the order, sir. That's what we have to talk about. Those three men knew where to find me, and there was only one way they could've learned. It was a KGB drop and they were *Cons Op* personnel. Moscow gave it to Congdon; he relayed it.'

'Congdon reached the *Soviets*? That's not plausible. Even if he tried, why would they co-operate? Why would they reveal a drop?'

'Their own man was part of the negotiation; they wanted him killed. He was trying to contact me. We'd exchanged cables.'

'Taleniekov?'

It was Scofield's moment to pause. He answered quietly. 'Yes, sir.'

'A *white* contact?'

'Yes. I misread it, but that's what it was. I'm convinced now.'

'*You . . . and Taleniekov? Extraordinary . . .*'

'The circumstances are extraordinary. Do you remember an organization from the 'forties that went by the name of the *farese*? . . .'

strollers, no one anywhere. They met at a pre-arranged spot on the edge of the small gorge. Taleniekov spoke first.

'I saw nothing; the area is secure.'

Scofield looked at his watch in the darkness. 'It's nearly eight-thirty. I'll wait by the car; you stay up here at this end. I'll meet with him first and then signal you.'

'How? It's several hundred yards.'

'I'll strike a match.'

'Very appropriate.'

'What?'

'Nothing. It's unimportant.'

At two minutes to nine, Winthrop's limousine came out of the Rock Creek exit, drove into the parking area, and stopped within twenty feet of the rented car. The sight of the chauffeur disturbed Bray, but only momentarily. Scofield recognized the huge man instantly; he had been with Robert Winthrop for over two decades. Rumours about a chequered Marine Corps career cut short by several courts martial followed the chauffeur, but Winthrop never discussed him other than to call him 'my friend Stanley'. No one ever pressed.

Bray walked out of the shadows towards the limousine. Stanley opened the door and was on the pavement in one motion, his right hand in his pocket, in his left a flashlight. He turned it on. Scofield shut his eyes. It went off in seconds.

'Hello, Stanley,' said Bray.

'It's been a long time, Mr Scofield,' replied the chauffeur. 'to see you.'

'Thanks. Good to see you.'

'The ambassador's waiting,' continued the driver, reaching down and snapping the lock release. 'The door's open now.'

'Fine. By the way, in a couple of minutes I'm going to get out of the car and strike a match. It's the signal for a man to come and join us. He's up at the other end; he'll walk out of one of the paths.'

'I gotcha. The ambassador said there'd be two of you. Okay.'

'What I'm trying to say is, if you still smoke those thin cigars of yours, wait till I get out before you light up. I'd like a few moments alone with Mr Winthrop.'

'You've got a hell of a memory,' said Stanley, tapping his jacket pocket with the flashlight. 'I was about to have one.'

Bray got into the back seat of the car and faced the man who

was responsible for his life. Winthrop had grown old, so old, but in the dim light his eyes were still electric, still filled with concern. They shook hands, the elder statesman prolonging the grip.

'I've thought about you often,' he said softly, his eyes searching Scofield's, then noting the bandages and wincing. 'I have mixed feelings, but I don't think I have to tell you that.'

'No, sir, you don't.'

'So many things changed, didn't they, Bray? The ideals, the opportunities to do so much for so many. We were crusaders, really. At the beginning.' The old man released Scofield's hand and smiled. 'Do you remember? You came up with a processing plan that was to be cross-collateralized with lend-lease. Debts in occupied territories for multiple immigration. A brilliant concept in economic diplomacy, I've always said that. Human lives for ponies that were never going to be repaid anyway.'

'It would have been rejected.'

'Probably, but in the arena of world opinion it would have pushed the Soviets to the wall. I recall your words. You said "we're supposed to be a capitalistic government, don't walk away from it. Use it, define it. American citizens paid for half the Russian Army. Stress the psychological obligation. Get something, get *people*." Those were your words.'

'That was a graduate student expounding on naïve theoretical geopolitics.'

'There's often a great deal of truth in such naïveté. You know. I can still see that graduate student. I wonder about him...'

'There's no time now, sir,' interrupted Scofield. 'Taleniekov's waiting. Incidentally, we checked the area; it's clear.'

The old man's eyes blinked. 'Did you think it would be otherwise?'

'I was worried about a tap on your phone.'

'No need for that,' said Winthrop. 'Such devices have to be

'Did you learn anything?'

'About the Matarese? No... and yes. No, in the sense that the most rarefied intelligence data contained no whatsoever, hasn't for the past forty-three years.'

assured me of this and I trust him. He was appalled; he leapt at the possibility and put men on the alert. He was furious, and frightened, I think.'

'What's the "yes"?'

The old man chose his words carefully. 'It's obscure but it's there. Before I decided to call the President, I reached five men who for years – decades – have been involved in the most sensitive areas of intelligence and diplomacy. Of the five, three remembered the Matarese and were shocked. They offered to do whatever they could to help, the spectre of the Matarese's return was quite terrifying to them . . . Yet the other two – men, who if anything, are far more knowledgeable than their colleagues – claimed *never* to have heard of it. Their reactions made no sense; they *had* to have heard of it. Just as I had – my information minimal but certainly not forgotten. When I said as much, when I pressed them, both behaved rather strangely, and considering our past associations, not without insult. Each treated me as though I were some kind of aged patrician, given to senile fantasies. Really, it was astonishing.'

'Who were they?'

'Again, odd . . .'

A flash of light in the distance; Scofield's eyes were drawn to it. And another . . . and *another*. Matches were being struck in rapid succession.

Talenickov.

The KGB man was cupping matches and lighting one after another furiously. It was a warning. Talenickov was warning him something had happened – *was happening*. Suddenly the instant flame was constant, but broken by a hand held in front of the flame – in rapid sequences, more light, less light. Basic Morse. Dots and dashes.

Three dots repeated twice. *S*. A long spill, repeated once. A single dash. *T*.

S. T.

'What's the matter?' asked Winthrop.

'Just a second,' replied Scofield.

Three dots, broken, then followed by a dash. The letters *S* and *T* were being repeated. *S. T.*

Surveillance. Terminal.

The flame moved to the left, towards the road bordering the woods of the parking area, and was extinguished. The Soviet agent

Two loud reports came from the woods beyond; the searchlight exploded, a scream of pain followed. Winthrop's car straightened out briefly, then lurched into a sharp left turn. Caught in the headlights were two men, weapons drawn, a third on the ground.

Bray's gun was in his hand; he dropped to the pavement and fired. One of the two men fell as the limousine completed the turn and roared out of the parking lot into the south-bound road.

Scofield rolled to his right; two shots were fired, the bullets ringing off the pavement where he had been seconds ago. Bray got to his feet and ran in the darkness towards the railing that fronted the ravine.

He lunged over the top rail, his attaché case slamming into the wood post, the sound distinct. The next gunshot was expected; it came as he hugged the earth and the rocks.

Lights. Headlights! Two beams shooting overhead, accompanied by the sound of a racing car. The smashing of glass came hard upon tyres screeching to a sudden stop. A shout – unclear, hysterical . . . cut off by a loud explosion – preceded silence.

The engine had stalled, the headlights still on, revealing curls of smoke and two immobile bodies on the ground, a third on his knees, looking around in panic. The man heard something; he spun and raised his gun.

A weapon was fired from the woods. It was final; the would-be killer fell.

'*Scofield!*' Taleniekov shouted.

'Over here!' Bray lunged up over the railing and ran towards source of the Russian's voice. Taleniekov walked out of the woods; he was no more than ten feet from the stalled automobile.

Two men approached the car warily; the driver's window had been shattered, blown apart by a single shot from the KGB man's automatic. The head beyond the fragmented glass was bloodied but recognizable. The right hand was wrapped in a tight bandage – still wrapped from an injured thumb broken on a bridge in Amsterdam at three o'clock in the morning by an angry, tired older man.

It was the aggressive young agent, Harry, who had killed so needlessly in the rain that night.

'*Good God!*' said Scofield.

'You know him?' asked Taleniekov, a curious note in his voice.

'His name was Harry. He worked for me in Amsterdam.'

The Russian was silent for a moment, then spoke: 'He was *with*

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The Russian was silent for a moment, then spoke. 'He was *with*

you in Amsterdam, but he did not work for you, and his name was not "Harry". That young man is a Soviet intelligence officer, trained since the age of nine at the American Compound in Novograd. He was a VKR agent.'

Bray studied Talenkov's face, then looked back through the shattered window at Harry. 'Congratulations Things fall into place more clearly now.'

'They don't for me, I'm afraid,' said the KGB man. 'Believe me when I tell you that it is most unlikely that any order out of Moscow would include a direct attack on Robert Winthrop. We're not fools. He's above reprisals - a voice and a skill to be preserved, not struck down. And certainly not for such - personnel - as you and me.'

'What do you mean?'

'This was an execution team, as surely as those men at the hotel. You and I were not to be isolated, not to be taken separately. The kill was inclusive. Winthrop was to be executed as well, and for all we know he may have been. I submit that the order did not come from Moscow.'

'It didn't come from the State Department. I'm damn sure of that.'

'Agreed. Neither Washington nor Moscow, but a source capable of issuing orders in the name of one, or the other, or both.'

'The Matarese?' said Scofield.

The Russian nodded. 'The Matarese.'

Bray held his breath, trying to think, to absorb it all. 'If Winthrop's still alive, he'll be caged, tapped, held under a microscope. I won't be able to get near him. They'd kill me on sight.'

'Again, I agree. Are there others you trust that can be reached?'

'It's crazy,' said Scofield, shivering in the cold - and at the thought that now struck him. 'There should be, but I don't know who they are. Whoever I went to would have to turn me over, the laws are clear about that. Police warrants aside, there's a little matter of national security. The case against me will be built quickly, legally. Suspected of treason, internal espionage, delivering information to the enemy. No one will touch me.'

'Surely there are people who will listen to you.'

'Listen to what? What do I tell them? What have I got? You? You'd be thrown into a maximum security hospital before you could say your name. The words of a dying *imbetille*? A Communist killer? Where's the verification, even the logic? Goddamn

it, we're cut off. All we've got are shadows!

Talenickov took a step forward, his conviction in his voice. 'Perhaps old Krupsky was right; perhaps the answer is in Corsica, after all.'

'Oh, Christ . . .'

'Hear me out. You say we have only shadows. If so, if we *had* more, traced even a few names, constructed a fabric of probability – built our own case if you will. Then could you go to someone, force him to listen to you?

'From a distance,' answered Bray slowly. 'Only from a distance. Beyond reach.'

'Naturally.'

'The case would have to be more than probable, it'd have to get goddamned conclusive.'

'I, too, could move men in Moscow if I had such proof. It was my hope that over here an inquiry might be made with less evidence. You're notorious for your never-ending Senate inquiries. I merely assumed it could be done, that you could bring it about.'

'Not now. Not me.'

'Corsica, then?'

'I don't know. I'd have to think about it. There's still Winthrop.'

'You said yourself you could not reach him. If you tried to get near him, they'd kill you.'

'People have tried before. I'll protect myself. I've got to find out what happened. He saw it for himself; if he's alive and I can talk to him, he'll know what to do.'

'And if he's *not* alive, or you cannot reach him?'

Scofield looked at the dead men on the pavement. 'Maybe the only thing that's left. Corsica.'

The KGB man shook his head. 'I look at odds more thoroughly than you, Beowulf. I won't wait. I won't risk that "hospital" you speak of. I'll go to Corsica now.'

'If you do, start on the south-east coast, north of Porto Vecchio.'

'Why?'

'It's where it all began. It's Matarese country.'

Talenickov nodded. 'Again, the schoolwork. Thank you. Perhaps we'll meet in Corsica.'

'Can you get out of the country?' asked Bray.

'Getting in, getting out . . . easily managed. These are not obstacles. What about yourself? If you decide to join me.'

'I can buy my way to London, to Paris. I've got accounts here. If I do, count on three days, four at the outside. There are small inns up in the hills. I'll find you . . .'

Scofield stopped. Both men turned swiftly at the sound of an approaching automobile. A sedan swung casually off the road into the parking area. In the front seat was a couple, the man's arm draped over the woman's shoulder. The headlights shone directly on the immobile bodies on the pavement, the spill illuminating the shattered window of the stalled car and the bloody head inside.

The driver whipped his arm off the woman's shoulder, pushing her down on the seat, and gripped the steering wheel with both hands. He spun it violently to the right and sped back into the road, the roar of the motor echoing throughout the woods and the open space.

'They'll reach the police,' said Bray. 'Let's get out of here.'

'I submit it would be best not to use that car,' replied the KGB man.

'Why not?'

'Winthrop's chauffeur. You may trust him. I'm not sure I do.'

'That's crazy! He was damn near killed!'

Taleniekov gestured at the dead men on the pavement. 'These were marksmen, Russian or American, it makes no difference, they were experts - the Matarese would employ no less. The windshield of that limousine was at least five feet wide, the driver behind it an easy target for a novice. Why wasn't he shot? Why wasn't that car stopped? We look for traps, Beowulf. We were led into one and we didn't see it. Perhaps even by Winthrop himself.'

Bray felt sick; he had no answer. 'We'll separate. It's better for both of us.'

'Corsica, perhaps?'

'Maybe. You'll know if I get there. Three, four days at the outside. If I go.'

'Very well.'

'Taleniekov?'

'Yes?'

'Thanks for using the matches.'

'Under the circumstances, I believe you would have done the same for me.'

'Under the circumstances . . . yes, I would.'

'Has it struck you? We did not kill each other, Beowulf Agate. We talked.'

'We talked.'

A lone siren was carried on the cold night wind. Others would be heard soon; patrol cars would converge on the killing ground. Both men turned away from each other and ran, Scofield down the dark patch into the woods beyond the rented car, Talenickov towards the railing that fronted the ravine in Rock Creek Park.

Book II

The thick-beamed fishing boat ploughed through the chopping swells like a heavy awkward animal dimly aware that the waters were unfriendly. Waves slapped against the bow and the sides, sending cascading sprays over the gunwhales, the tails of 'salt' whipped by the early morning winds into the faces of men handling the nets.

One man, however, was not involved with the drudgery of the catch. He pulled at no rope and manipulated no hook, nor did he join in the cursing and laughter that were by-products of making a haul from the sea. Instead, he sat alone on the deck; a thermos of coffee in one hand, a cupped cigarette in the other. It was understood that should French or Italian patrol boats approach, he would become a fisherman, but if none did he was to be left by himself. No one objected to this strange man without a name, for each member of the crew was 10,000 lire richer for his presence. The boat had picked him up on a pier in San Vincenzo. The vessel's schedule had called for a dawn departure from the Italian coast, but the stranger had suggested that if the coast of Corsica were seen by dawn, captain and crew would have a far better catch for their labours. Rank had its privileges; the captain received 15,000 lire. They had sailed out of San Vincenzo before midnight.

Scofield twisted the top back on to the thermos and threw his cigarette over the side. He stood up and stretched, peering through the mists at the coastline. They had made good time.

According to the captain they would be in sight of Solenzara within minutes; and within an hour they would drop off their esteemed passenger between Sainte Lucie and Porto Vecchio. No problems were anticipated; there were scores of deserted inlets on the rocky shoreline for a temporarily disabled fishing boat.

Bray yanked on the cord looped around the handle of his attaché case and strapped to his wrist; it was firm – and wet. The string-burn on his wrist was irritated by the salt water, but it would heal quickly, actually aided by the salt. The precaution might seem unwarranted, but the appearance of it was as valuable as the attachment. One could doze, and *Corsos* were known to be quick to relieve travellers of valuables – especially travellers who journeyed without identification, but with money.

'*Signore!*' The captain approached, his wide smile revealing an absence of eye teeth. '*Ecco. Solenzara! Trenta minuti. Nord di Porto Vecchio!*'

'*Grazie.*'

'*Prego!*'

In a half-hour he'd be on land, in Corsica, in the hills where the Matarese was born. That it had been born was not disputed, that it had provided assassins-for-hire until the mid-'thirties was accepted as a firm probability. But so very little was known about it that no one really knew how much of its story was myth and how much based in reality. The legend was both encouraged and scorned at the same time; it was basically an enigma because no one understood its origins. Only that a madman named Guillaume de Matarese had summoned a council – from where was never recorded – and gave birth to a band of assassins, based, some said, on the killer-society of Hassan ibn as-Sabbāh in the eleventh century.

Yet this smacked of cult-orientation, thus feeding the myth and diminishing the reality. No court testimony was ever given, no assassin ever caught who could be traced to an organization called the Matarese; if there were confessions, none was ever made public. Still the rumours persisted. Stories were circulated in high places; articles appeared in responsible newspapers, only to be denied editorial substance in later editions. Several independent studies were begun; if any was completed, no one knew about it. And through it all, governments made no move. Ever. They were silent.

And for a young intelligence officer studying the

assassination years ago, it was this silence that lent a certain edibility to the Matarese.

Just as another silence, suddenly imposed three days ago, convinced him that the rendezvous in Corsica was no proposal made in the heat of violence, but the only thing that was left. The Matarese remained an enigma, but it was no myth. It was a reality. A powerful man had gone to other powerful men and spoken in alarm; it was not to be tolerated.

Robert Winthrop had disappeared.

Bray had run from Rock Creek Park three nights before and made his way to a motel on the outskirts of Fredericksburg. For hours he had travelled up and down the highway calling Winthrop from a series of telephone booths, never the same one twice, hitching rides on the pretext of a disabled car to put distance between them. He had talked to Winthrop's wife, promising her he was sure, but saying nothing of substance, only that he had to speak with the ambassador. Until it was dawn, and there was no answer on the phone, just interminable rings spaced further and farther apart – or so it seemed – and no one at all on the line.

There had been nowhere to turn, no one to go to; the networks were spreading out for him. If they found him, his termination would be complete; he understood that. If he were permitted to live, it would be within the four walls of a cell, or worse, as a vegetable. But he did not think he would be permitted to live. Peniekov had been right: they were both marked.

There was an answer, it was four thousand miles away in the Mediterranean. In his attaché case were a dozen false passports, the bank books under assumed names, and a list of men and women who could find him all manner of transportation. He had left Fredericksburg at dawn two days ago, had stopped at banks in London and Paris, and late last night had reached a fishing pier in San Vincenzo.

And now he was within minutes of setting foot on Corsica: the long stretches of immobility in the air and over the water had given him time to think, or at least the time to organize his thoughts. He had to start with the incontrovertible; there were no established facts:

Guillaume de Matarese had existed and there'd been a group of men who had called themselves the Council of the Matarese, dedicated to the insane theories of its sponsor. The world moved

Taleniekov, his own execution team recruited from Marseilles, Amsterdam and Prague . . . all were a prelude to the disappearance of Robert Winthrop. All were tied to this modern Council of the Matarrese. It was the unseen, unknown mover.

Who were they, these hidden men who had the resources to reach into the highest places of governments as readily as they financed wild-eyed terrorists and selected celebrated men for murder? The larger question was why. *Why?* For what purposes or purposes did they exist?

The *who* was the riddle that had to be unravelled first . . . and whoever they were, there had to be a connection between them and those fanatics initially summoned by Guillaume de Matarrese where else could they have come from, how else could they have known? Those early men had come to the hills of Porto Vecchio, they had names. The past was the only point of departure he had.

There'd been another, he reflected, but the flare of a match in the woods of Rock Creek Park had erased it. Robert Winthrop had been about to name two powerful men in Washington who had vehemently denied any knowledge of the Matarrese. In their denials was their complicity; they *had* to have heard of the Matarrese – one way or the other. But Winthrop had not said those names; the violence had intervened. Now he would never say them.

Names past could lead to names present; in this case, they had to. Men left their works, their imprints on their times . . . their . . . All could be traced and led somewhere. If there were keys to unlock the vaults that held the answers to the Matarrese, they would be found in the hills of Porto Vecchio. He had to find them . . . as his enemy, Vasili Taleniekov had to find them. Neither would survive unless they did. There'd be no farm in Grasnov for the Russian, no new life for Beowulf Agate, until they found the answers and delivered them to those elusive men of conscience Taleniekov had spoken of three nights ago in Washington.

'*Attualmente!*' roared the captain, spinning the wheel. '*Lo accesso roccio!*' He turned, grinning at his passenger through the wind-blown spray. '*Cinque minuti, signore! La terra di Corsica!*'

'*Grazie.*'

'*Prego.*'

Corsica.

could take one man and have several hours to work on his mind and body, he could learn a great deal. He had no compunction about doing so. The night before a wooden bed had been blown apart in the darkness as a Corsican stood silhouetted in the doorway, a Lupo shotgun in his hand. Taleniekov was presumed to have been in that bed . . . Just one man – *that* man – though Vasili, suppressing his anger, as he ran into a small cluster of wild fir trees just beneath the crown of the hill. He could rest for a few moments.

Far below he could see the weak beams of flashlights. *One, two . . . three.* Three men and they *were* separating. The one on the extreme left was covering his area; it would take that man ten minutes of climbing to reach the cluster of wild fir. Taleniekov hoped it was the man with the Lupo. He leaned against a tree, breathing heavily, and let his body go limp.

It had happened so fast, the excursion into this primitive world. Yet there was a symmetry of a kind. He had begun running at night along the wooded banks of a ravine in Washington's Rock Creek Park and here he was in an isolated, tree-lined sanctuary high in the hills of Corsica. At night. The journey had been swift; he had known precisely what to do and when to do it.

Two days ago he had been in Rome's Leonardo da Vinci Airport, where he had negotiated for a private flight to Bonifacio, due west, on the southern tip of Corsica. He had reached Bonifacio by seven in the evening and a taxi had driven him north along the coast to Porto Vecchio and up to an inn in the hills. He had sat down to a heavy Corsican meal, engaging a curious owner in off-hand conversation.

'I am a scholar of sorts,' he had said. 'I seek information about a *padrone* of many years ago. A Guillaume de Matarese.'
'I do not understand,' the innkeeper had replied. 'You say a scholar of sorts. It would seem to me that one either is or is not a *signore*. Are you with some great university?'

'A private foundation, actually.' Taleniekov had answered slowly, even hesitantly, thus opening a door with obvious reluctance. 'But universities have access to our studies.'

'*Una fondazione?*'

'*Una organizzazione accademica.* My section deals with little-known history in Sardinia and Corsica during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Apparently there was this *padrone* . . . Guillaume de Matarese . . . who controlled much of the

land in these hills north of Porto Vecchio.'

'He owned most of it, *signore*. He was good to the people who lived on his lands. If that is control it is *benevolo*, no?'

'Naturally. And we would like to grant him a place in Corsica's history. I'm not sure I know where to begin.'

'Perhaps . . .' The innkeeper had leaned back in the chair, his eyes levelled, his voice strangely non-committal. 'The ruins of the Villa Matarese. It is a clear night, *signore*. They are quite beautiful in the moonlight. I could find someone to take you. Unless, of course, you are too exhausted from your journey.'

'Not at all. It was a quick flight. From Milan.'

He had been taken farther up into the hills, to the skeletal remains of a once-sprawling estate, the remnants of the great house itself covering nearly an acre of land. Jagged walls and broken chimneys were the only structures still standing. On the ground, the brick borders of an enormous circular drive could be discerned beneath the overgrowth as it swung in front of flat tiered relics that once had been marble steps. On both sides of the great house, stone paths sliced through the tall grass, dotted by broken trellises, remembrances of lushly cultivated gardens long since destroyed.

--The entire ruins stood eerily on the hill in silhouette, heightened by the backwash of moonlight. Guillaume de Matarese had built a monument to himself and the power of the edifice had lost nothing in its destruction by time and the elements. Instead, the skeleton had a force of its own, giving rise to images that perhaps could not be fulfilled when whole. Villa Matarese had a mystic quality about it and that mysticism had been intrinsic to the dramatic lesson that had followed.

Vasili had heard the voices behind him, the young boy who'd escorted him was nowhere to be seen. There had been two men and those opening words of dubious greeting had been the beginning of an interrogation that had lasted over an hour. It would have been a simple matter to subdue both Corsicans and reverse the proceedings, but Taleniekov knew he could learn more through passive resistance; unschooled interrogators imparted more than they dragged forth when they dealt with tra subjects. He had stayed with his story of the *organizzat*, *accademica*; at the end, he had been advised b

'Go back where you came from here that would serve you; we

through these mountains years ago; none is left who might help you.'

'There must be older people in the hills. Perhaps if I wandered about and made a few inquiries.'

'We are older people, *signore*, and we cannot answer your inquiries. Go back. We are ignorant men in these parts, shepherds by trade and ownership. We are not comfortable when strangers intrude on our simple ways. Go back.'

'I shall take your advice under consideration . . .'

'Do not take such trouble, *signore*. Just leave us,' had been the reply.

In the morning, Vasili had walked back up into the hills, to the Villa Matarese and beyond, stopping at numerous thatched farmhouses, asking his questions, noting the dark Corsican eyes that had glared before the non-answers had been delivered, aware that he was being followed.

He had been told nothing, of course, but in the progressively hardened reactions to his presence he had learned something of consequence. Men were not only following him, they had been preceding him, alerting families in the hills that a stranger was coming. He was to be treated indifferently, no traveller to be brought in front of a fire or given tea; he was to be sent away, told nothing.

That night – last night, thought Taleniekov, as he watched the weaving beam of the flashlight on the left slowly ascend the hill – innkeeper had approached his table.

'I am afraid, *signore*, that I cannot permit you to stay here any more. I have rented the room.'

Vasili had glanced up, no hesitation now in his speech. 'Apity. I need only an armchair or a cot, if you could spare one. I shall be leaving first thing in the morning. I've found what I came for.'

'And what is that, *signore*?'

'You'll know soon enough, my friend. Others will come after me, with the proper equipment and land records. There'll be a very thorough, very scholarly investigation. What happened here is fascinating. I speak academically, of course.'

'Of course . . . Perhaps one more night.'

Six hours later a man had burst into his room and fired two shots from the thick barrels of a deadly sawed-off shotgun called

the Lupo - the 'wolf'. Taleniekov had been waiting; he had watched from behind a partially open closet door as the wooden bed exploded, the firm stuffing beneath the covers blown into the dark wall.

The sound had been shattering, an explosion echoing throughout the small country inn, yet no one had come running to see what had happened. Instead, the man with the Lupo had stood in the doorframe and had spoken quietly in Oltramontanan, as if uttering an oath.

'Perro nostro circolo,' he had said; then he had raced away.

It had meant nothing, yet Vasili knew then that it meant everything. Words delivered as an incantation after taking a life . . . *For our circle.*

Taleniekov had gathered his things together and fled from the inn. He had made his way towards the single dirt road that led up from Porto Vecchio and had positioned himself in the underbrush twenty feet from the edge. Several hundred yards below, he had seen the glow of a cigarette. The road was being guarded; he had waited. He had to.

If Scofield was coming he would use that road; it had been the dawn of the fourth day. The American had said that if Corsica was all that was left, he'd be there in three or four days.

By three in the afternoon there had been no sign of him, and an hour later Vasili knew he could wait no longer. Men had sped down the road towards the burgeoning port resort. Their mission had been clear: the intruder had eluded the road block. Find him, kill him.

Search parties had begun fanning through the woods; two Corsicans slashing the overgrowth with mountain machetes had come within thirty feet of him; soon the patrols would become more concentrated, the search more thorough. He could not wait for Scofield; there was no guarantee that Beowulf Agate had even escaped from the net being spread for him in his own country, much less was on his way to Corsica.

Vasili had spent the hours until sundown creating his own assaults on those who would trap him. Like a swamp fox, his trail appeared one moment heading in *this* direction, his appearance sighted over *there*; broken branches and trampled reeds were proof that he was cornered in a stretch of marshland that fronted on unclimbable rock wall, and as men closed in, his

figure could be seen racing through a field a mile to the west. He was a yellowjack on the wind, visually stinging in a dozen different places at once.

When darkness had come, Taleniekov began the strategy that led him to where he was at the moment, hidden in a cluster of firs, trees below the crown of a high hill, waiting for a man carrying a flashlight to approach. The plan was simple, carried out in three stages, each phase logically evolved from the previous. First came the diversion, drawing off the largest number of the attacking pack as possible; then the exposure to the few left behind, pulling them farther away from the many; finally the separation of those few and the trapping of one. The third phase was about to be concluded as the fires raged a mile and a half below to the east.

He had made his way through the woods, descending in the direction of Porto Vecchio, travelling on the right side of the dirt road. He had gathered together dried branches and leaves, breaking several Graz-Burya shells, sprinkling the powder inside the pile of debris. He had ignited his pyre in the forest, waited until it had erupted and he had heard the shouts of the converging Corsicans. He had raced northward, across the road, into a denser, drier section of the wooded hill and repeated the action, lighting a larger pile of dried foliage next to a dead chestnut.

It had spread like a fire-bomb, the flames leaping upward

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He had crossed diagonally back to the south-west, climbing through the woods to the road that fronted the inn. He had emerged within sight of the window through which he had escaped the night before. He had walked out on the road, seeing several men with rifles – one weapon short-barrelled and thick: a Lupo – standing, talking anxiously among themselves. The rear-guard, confused by the chaos below, unsure whether they should remain where they were, as instructed by superiors, or go to the aid of their island brothers.

The irony of coincidence had not been lost on Vasili as he had struck the match. The striking of a match had started it all so

many days ago on Washington's Nebraska Avenue; it was the sign of a trap. It signified another in the hills of Corsica.

'Ecco!'

'Leggiero!'

'E l'uomo lui! L'uomo!'

The chase had begun; it was now coming to an end. The man with the flashlight was within a stone's throw from him; he would climb up into the cluster of wild fir before the next thirty seconds elapsed. Below, on the slope of the hill, the flashlight in the centre was several hundred yards to the south, its beam criss-crossing the ground in front of the Corsican holding it. Far down to the right, the third flashlight, which only seconds before had been sweeping frantically back and forth in semi-circles, was now oddly stationary, its beam angled down to a single spot. The position of the light and its abrupt immobility bothered Taleniekov, but there was no time to evaluate either fact. The approaching Corsican had reached the first tree in Vasili's natural sanctuary.

The man swung the beam of light into the cluster of trunks and hanging limbs. Taleniekov had broken a number of branches, stripping more than a few so that any light would catch the white wood. The Corsican stepped forward, following the trail; Vasili stepped to his left, concealed by a tree. The hunter passed within eighteen inches, his rifle at the ready. Taleniekov watched the Corsican's feet in the wash of light; when the left foot moved forward a beat would be lost for a right-handed marksman, the brief imbalance impossible to recover.

The foot left the ground and Vasili lunged, lashing his arm around the man's neck, his fingers surging in for the trigger

onto the ground. He scissored the man's waist with his legs, forcing the Corsican's neck into a painful arch, the man's ear next to his lips.

'You and I will spend the next hour together,' he whispered in Italian.

know

face

slow

Gradually, Vasili released the pressure on the man's

neck. Both men started to rise, Talenickov's fingers gripped around the man's throat.

There was a sudden *crack* from above, the sound echoing throughout the trees. A foot had stepped on a fallen branch. Vasili spun around, peering up into the dense foliage. What he saw caused him to lose his breath.

A man was silhouetted between two trees, the silhouette familiar, last seen in the doorframe of a country inn. And as that last time, the thick barrels of a Lupo were levelled straight ahead. But now they were levelled at him.

In the rush of thought, Talenickov understood that not all professionals were trained in Moscow and Washington. The frenetically waving beam of light at the base of the hill, suddenly still, motionless. A flashlight strapped to a sapling or a resilient limb, pulled back and set in motion to give the illusion of movement, its owner racing in darkness up a familiar incline.

'You were very clever last night, *signore*,' said the man with the Lupo. 'But there is nowhere to hide here.'

'The *Matarèsel*!' screamed Vasili at the top of his lungs. '*Perro nostro circulo!*' he roared. He lunged to his left. The double-barrelled explosion of the Lupo filled the hills.

Scofield jumped over the side of the skiff and waded through the waves toward the shoreline. There was no beach, only boulders joined together, forming a three-dimensional wall of jagged stone. He reached a promontory of flat, slippery rock and braced himself against the waters, balancing the attaché case in his left hand, his canvas duffelbag in his right.

He rolled on to the sandy, vine-covered ground until the surface was level enough to stand. Then he ran into the tangled brush that concealed him from any wandering patrols above on the broken cliffs. The captain had warned him that the police were inconsistent; some could be bought, others not.

He knelt down, took a penknife from his pocket, and cut the webbed strap off his wrist, freeing the case. Then he opened the duffelbag and took out dry corduroy trousers, a pair of ankle boots, a dark sweater, a cap and a coarse woollen jacket, all bought in Paris, all labels torn off. They were sufficiently rough in appearances to be accepted as native garb.

He changed, rolled up the wet clothes and stuffed them into the duffelbag along with the attaché case, then started the long, winding climb to the road above. He had been to Corsica twice before — Porto Vecchio once — both trips basically concerned with an obnoxious, constantly sweating owner of fishing boats in Bastia who operated out of Murato and was on State's payroll as one more 'observer' of Soviet Liguria.

brief sojourn south to Porto Vecchio had been in connection with the feasibility of covertly financing resort projects in the Tyrrhenian; he never knew what happened. While in Porto Vecchio he had rented a car and driven up into the hills. He had seen the ruins of Villa Matarese in the broiling afternoon sun and had stopped for a glass of beer at a roadside *taverna*, but the excursion had faded quickly from his mind. It never occurred to him that he would ever return. The legend of the Matarese was no more alive than the ruins of the villa. Not then.

He reached the road and pulled the cap down, the cloth covering the bruise on his upper forehead where he had collided with an iron post in a stairwell. A staircase where his life might have ended but for an enemy who had saved it.

Teleniekov. Had he reached Corsica? Was he somewhere in the hills of Port Vecchio? It would not take long to find out. A stranger asking questions about a legend would be easily tracked down. On the other hand, the Russian would be cautious; if it had occurred to them to go back to the source of the legend, it might well occur to others to do the same.

Bray looked at his watch; it was nearly eleven-thirty. He took out a map, estimating his position as two and a half miles south of Sainte Lucie; the most direct line to the hills – to the Matarese hills, he reflected – was due west. But there was something to find before he entered those hills. A base of operations. A place where he could conceal his things with the reasonable expectation that they would be there when he came back. That ruled out any al stop a traveller might make. He could not master the *amontanan* dialect in a few hours; he'd be marked as a stranger and strangers were marks. He would have to make camp in the woods, near water if possible, and preferably within walking distance of a store or inn where he could get food.

He had to assume he would be in Porto Vecchio for several days. No other assumption was feasible; anything could happen once he found Teleniekov – if he found him – but for the moment the necessities had to be considered before any plan was formulated. All the little things.

There was a path – too narrow for any car to travel, a shepherd's route perhaps – that veered off the road into a gently rising series of fields; it headed west. He shifted the canvas duffelbag to his left hand and entered it, pushing aside

over the years. Lives had been rebuilt, past histories beyond the reach of present associates, new friends, new occupations, even families.

He could do the same, thought Bray. Maybe he would; he had the papers and the money. He could pay his way to Polynesia or the Cook Islands, buy a boat for charter, probably make a decent living. It could be a good life, an anonymous existence, an end to the deadly games.

Then he saw the face of Robert Winthrop, the electric eyes searching his, and heard the anxiety in the old man's voice as he spoke of the Matarese.

He heard something else, too. Less distant, immediate, above in the sky. Birds were swooping down in frantic circles, their screeches echoing harshly, angrily over the fields and throughout the woods. Intruders had disturbed their hedom. He could hear men running, hear their shouts.

Had he been *spotted*? He rose quickly to his knees, taking his Browning from his jacket pocket, and peered through a spray of pine needles.

Below, a hundred yards to the left, two men had hacked their way with machetes down the overgrown bank to the edge of the stream. They stood for a moment, pistols in their belts, glancing swiftly in every direction, as if unsure of their next moves. Slowly Bray let out his breath: they were not after him; he had not been seen. Instead, the two men had been hunting - an animal that had attacked their goats, perhaps, or a wild dog. Not him. Not a stranger wandering in the hills.

Then he heard the words and knew he was only partially right. The shout did not come from either Corsican holding a machete; came from over the bank of the stream, from the field beyond. *"Il uomo. Eccolo! Il campo!"*

It was no animal being pursued, but a man. A man was running from other men, and to judge from the fury of his pursuers, that man was running for his life. Taleniekov? Was it Taleniekov? And if it was, why? Had the Russian learned something so quickly? Something that the Corsicans in Porto Vecchio would kill for?

Scofield watched as the two men below took the guns from their belts and ran up the bank out of sight into the bordering field. He crawled back to the trunk of the tree and tried to gather his thoughts. Instinct convinced him that *il uomo, eccolo!* was

Taleniekov. If so, there were several options. He could head for the road and walk up into the hills, an Italian crewman with a fishing boat in for repairs and time on his hands; he could stay where he was until nightfall, then thread his way under cover of darkness, hoping to get near enough to hear men's conversations; or he could leave now and follow the hunt.

The last was the least attractive – but likely to be the most productive. He chose it.

It was 5.35 when Bray first saw him, running along the crest of a hill, shots fired at his weaving, racing figure in the glare of the setting sun. Taleniekov, as expected, was doing the unexpected. He was not trying to escape; rather he was using the chase to sow confusion and through that confusion learn something. The tactic was sound; the best way to uncover vital information was to make the enemy protect it.

But what had he so far learned that would justify the risk? How long would he – or could he – keep up the pace and the concentration to elude his enemy? . . . The answers were as clear as the questions: Isolate, trap and break. Within the territory.

Scofield studied the terrain as best he could from his prone position in the field. The early evening breezes made his task easier; the grass bent with each gentle sweep of wind, his view clearer for it. He tried to analyse the choices open to Taleniekov, where best to intercept him. The KGB man was running due north; another mile or so and he would reach the base of the mountains where he would stop. Nothing could be achieved by going up into them. He would double back, heading south-west to avoid being hemmed in by the roads. And somewhere he would

... compressed into a short period of time. Mistakes were made that way. It would be better to reach the Russian beforehand. That way, they could develop the strategy together. Crouching, Scofield made his way south-west through the tall grass.

The sun fell behind the distant mountains; the shadows lengthened until they became long shafts of ink, spilling over the hills, enveloping whole fields that moments ago had been drenched in orange sunlight. Darkness came and still there was

no sign, no sound of Talenickov. Bray moved swiftly within the logical perimeters of the Russian's logical area of movement, his eyes adjusting to the darkness, his ears picking up every noise foreign to the fields and the woods. *Still* no Talenickov.

Had the KGB man taken the risk of using either dirt road for faster mobility? If he had, it was foolhardy, unless he had conceived of a tactic better employed in the lower hills. The entire countryside was now alive with search parties ranging in size from two to six men, all armed, knives, guns and mountain machetes hanging from their clothing, their flashlight beams crisscrossing each other like intersecting lasers. Scofield raced farther west to higher ground, the myriad beams of light his protection against the roving, angry Corsicans; he knew when to stop, when to run.

He ran, cutting between two teams of converging men, halting abruptly at the sight of a whining animal, its fur thick, its eyes wide and staring. He was about to use his knife when he realized it was a shepherd's dog, its nostrils disinterested in human scent. The realization did not prevent him from losing his breath; he stroked the dog, reassuring it, then ducked beneath a flashlight beam that shot out of the woods, and scrambled farther up the sloping field.

He reached a boulder half buried in the ground and threw himself behind it. He got up slowly, his hands on the rock, prepared to spring away and run again. He looked over the top, down at the scene below, the flashlight beams breaking up the darkness, defining the whereabouts of the search parties. He was

able to make out the crude wooden structure that was the inn he stopped at years ago. In front of it was the primitive dirt road he had crossed several hours before to reach the higher ground. A hundred yards to the right of the inn was the wider, winding road that descended out of the hills down into Porto Vecchio.

The Corsicans were spread over the fields. Here and there Bray could hear the barking of dogs amid angry human shouts and the slashing of machetes. It was an eerie sight, no figures seen, just beams of light, shooting in all directions; invisible puppets dancing on illuminated strings in the darkness.

Suddenly, there was another light, yellow not white. *Fire.* An abrupt explosion of flames in the distance, to the right of the road that led to Porto Vecchio.

Talenickov's diversion. It had its effect.

Men ran, shouting, the beams of light converging on the road,

to spring his trap on one man?

The beginning of the answer came three minutes later. A second, larger eruption of flames surged skyward about a quarter of a mile to the *left* of the road to Porto Vecchio. A single diversion was now two, dividing the Corsicans, confusing the search; fire was lethal in the hills.

He could see the puppets now, their strings of light fusing with the glow of the spreading flames.

Another fire appeared, this one massive, an entire tree bursting into a ball of yellowish white as though detonated by napalm. It was three hundred or four hundred yards *farther left*, a third diversion greater than the previous two. Chaos spread as rapidly as the flames, both in danger of leaping out of control. Taleniev was covering all his bases; if a trap was not feasible he could escape in the confusion.

But if the Russian's mind was working as his might, thought Bray, the trap would be sprung in moments. He crawled around the boulder and started down the expanse of descending field, keeping his shoulders close to the ground, propelling himself as an animal, hands and feet working in concert.

There was a sudden flash far below on the road. It lasted no more than a second, a tiny eruption of light. A match had been struck. It appeared senseless until Bray saw a *flashlight* beam shoot out from the right, followed instantly by two others. The three beams converged in the direction of the *briefly held match*; seconds later they separated at the *base of the hill* that bordered the road below.

Scofield knew what the tactic was now. Four nights ago a match had been struck in Rock Creek Park to expose a trap; it

below the crest of the hill.
of grassland and forest the

question of finding out precisely where, if possible immobilizing one of the pursuers, thus favouring the odds for the trap's success. Better still, taking one of the Corsicans; two sources of information were better than one.

He ran in spurts, staying close to the ground, his eyes on the three flashlight beams below. Each was covering a section of the hill, and in the spills he could see weapons clearly; at the first sign of the hunted, shots would be fired . . .

Scofield stopped. Something was wrong; it was the beam of light on the right, the one perhaps two hundred yards directly beneath him. It was waving back and forth too rapidly, without focus. And there was no reflection – not even a dull reflection – of light bouncing off metal – even dull metal. There was no weapon.

There was no hand holding that flashlight! It had been secured firmly to a thick branch or a limb; a feint, a false placement given false motion to cover another movement. Bray lay on the ground, concealed by the grass and the darkness, watching, listening for signs of a man running.

It happened so fast, so unexpectedly, that Scofield nearly fired his gun in instinctive defence. The figure of a large Corsican was suddenly beside him, above him, the crunch of a racing foot not eighteen inches from his head. He rolled to his left, out of the running man's path.

He inhaled deeply, trying to throw off the shock and the fear, then rose cautiously and followed as best he could the trail of the racing Corsican. The man was heading directly north along the hill, below the ridge, as Bray had intended doing, relying on beams of light and sound – or the sudden absence of both – to find Taleniekov. The Corsican was familiar with the terrain. He quickened his pace, passing the centre beam of light still far below, and by passing it knowing that Taleniekov had fixed on the third man. The flashlight – barely seen – on the extreme north side of the hill.

Bray hurried faster; instinct told him to keep the Corsican in his sight. But the man was nowhere to be seen, no silhouette on the skyline, no sounds of running feet. All was silent, too silent. Scofield dropped to the ground and joined that silence, peering about in the darkness, his finger around the trigger of his automatic. It would happen any second. But how? *Where?*

About a hundred and fifty yards ahead, diagonally down to the right, the third beam of light appeared to go off and on in a series

of short, irregular flashes. No . . . It was not being turned off and on rapidly, the light was being *blocked*. Trees Whoever held the flashlight was walking into a cluster of trees growing on the side of the hill

Suddenly, the beam of light shot upward, dancing briefly in the higher regions of the thinning trunks, then plummeted down, the glow stationary, dulled by the foliage on the ground. That was it! The trap had been sprung, but Talemekov did not know a Corsican was waiting for a sign of that trap

Bray got to his feet and ran as fast as he could, his boots making harsh contact with the profusion of rocks on the hillside. He had only seconds, there was so much ground to cover, and too much darkness, he could not tell where the trees began. If there was only an outline to fire at, the sound of a voice *Voice*. He was about to shout to warn the Russian, when he heard a voice. The words were in that strange Italian spoken by the southern Corsicans, the sound floated up in the night breezes.

Thirty feet below him! He saw the man standing between two trees, his body outlined in the spill of the muted, immobile beam of light that glowed up from the ground, the Corsican held a shotgun in his hands. Scofield pivoted to his right and sprang towards the armed man, his automatic levelled

'The *Matarese*' The name was screamed by Talemekov, as was the enigmatic phrase that followed '*Perro nostro circulo*'

Bray fired into the back of the Corsican, the three rapid spits overwhelmed by an explosion from the shotgun. The man fell forward. Scofield dug his feet into the body, crouching, expecting an attack. What he saw prohibited it; the Corsican trapped by Talemekov had been blown apart by his would-be rescuer.

'Talemekov'

'You! Is it you, Scofield'

'Put that light out!' cried Bray. The Russian lunged for the flashlight on the ground, snapping it off. 'There's a man on the hill, he's not moving. He's waiting to be called.'

'If he comes, we must kill him. If we don't call, he'll go for help. He'll bring others back with him.'

'I'm not sure his friends can spare the time,' replied Scofield watching the beam of light in the darkness. 'You've got it pretty well tied up. There he goes! He's running down the hill.'

'Come!' said the Russian, getting up, approaching

know a dozen places to hide. I've got a great deal to tell you.'

'You must have.'

'I do. It's here!'

'What is?'

'I'm not sure . . . the answer, perhaps. Part of it anyway. You've seen for yourself. They're hunting me; they'd kill me on sight. I've intruded . . .'

'*Ferma!*' The sudden command was shouted from beyond Scofield on the hill. Bray spun on the ground; the Russian raised his gun. '*Basta!*' The second command was accompanied by the snarling of an animal, a dog straining on a leash. 'I have a two-barrelled rifle in my hands, *signori*,' continued the voice . . . the unmistakable voice of a woman, speaking now in English. 'As the one fired moments ago, it is a Lupo, and I know how to use it better than the man at your feet. But I do not wish to. Hold your guns to your sides, *signori*. Do not drop them; you may need them.'

'Who are you?' asked Scofield, squinting his eyes at the woman above. From what he could barely see in the night light, she was dressed in trousers and a field jacket. The dog snarled again.

'I look for the scholar.'

'The *what*?'

'I am he,' said Taleniekov. 'From the *organizzazione accademica*. This man is my associate.'

'What the hell are you . . .?' Bray looked over at the KGB

asta!' said the Russian quietly. 'Why do you look for me, do not kill me?'

'Word goes everywhere. You ask questions about the *padrone* of *padroni*.'

'I do. Guillaume de Matarese. No one wants to give me answers.'

'One does,' replied the woman. 'An old woman in the mountains. She wants to speak with the *erudito*, the scholar. She has things to tell him.'

'But you know what's happened here,' said Taleniekov, probing. 'Men are hunting me; they would kill me. You're willing to risk your own life to bring me - bring us - to her?'

'Yes. It is a long journey, and a hard one. Five or six hours up into the mountains.'

They travelled swiftly through the hills to the base of the mountains and up into winding trails cut out of the mountain forests. The dog had sniffed both men as the woman had placed her hand on each's shoulder; it was set free and preceded them along the overgrown paths, sure in its knowledge of the way, awaiting them at every turn.

Scofield thought it was the same dog he had come across so suddenly, so frighteningly, in the fields. He said as much to the woman.

'Probabilmente, signore. We were there for many hours. I was looking for you and I let him roam, but he was always near in I needed him.'

'Could he have attacked me?'

'Only if you raised your hand to him. Or to me.'

It was past midnight when they reached a flat stretch of grass-land that fronted what appeared to be a series of imposing, wooded hills. The low-flying clouds had thinned out; moonlight washed over the field, highlighting the peaks in the distance, lending grandeur to this section of the mountain range. Bray could see that Talenickov's shirt beneath the open jacket was as drenched with sweat as his own; and the night was cool.

'We can rest for a while now, signori,' said the woman, pointing to a dark area several hundred feet ahead, in the direction the dog had raced. *'Over there is a cave of stone in the hill. It is not very deep, but it is shelter.'*

'Your dog knows it,' added the KGB man.

'He expects me to build a fire,' laughed the girl. 'When it is raining, he takes sticks in his mouth and brings them inside to me. He is fond of the fire.'

The cave was dug out of dark rock, no more than ten feet deep, but at least six in height. They entered.

'Shall I light a fire?' Taleniekov asked, stroking the dog.

'If you wish Uccello will like you for it? I am too tired.'

'Uccello?' asked Scofield. ' "Bird" ?'

'He flies over the ground, *signore*.'

'You speak English very well,' said Bray, as the Russian piled sticks together within a circle of stones obviously used for previous fires. 'Where did you learn?'

'I went to the convent school in Vescovato. Those of us who wished to enter the government programmes studied French and English.'

Taleniekov struck a match beneath the kindling; the fire caught instantly, the flames crackling the wood, throwing warmth and light through the cave. 'You're very good at that sort of thing,' said Scofield to the KGB man.

'Thank you. It's a minor talent.'

'It wasn't minor a few hours ago.' Bray turned back to the woman, who had removed her cap and was shaking free her long dark hair. For an instant he stopped breathing and stared at her. Was it the hair? Or the wide, clear brown eyes that were the colour of a deer's eyes, or the high cheekbones or the chiselled nose above the generous lips that seemed so ready to laugh? Was it any of these things, or was he simply tired and grateful for the sight of an attractive, capable woman? He did not know; he knew only that this Corsican girl of the hills reminded him of Katrine, his wife whose death had been ordered by the man three feet away from him in that Corsican cave. He suppressed his thoughts and breathed again. 'And did you,' he asked, 'enter the government programmes?'

'As far as they would take me.'

'Where was that?'

'To the *scuola media* in Bonifacio. The rest I managed with the

... I am a
Comunista. I say it proudly.'

'Bravo . . .,' said Talenickov softly.

'One day we shall set things right throughout all Italy,' continued the girl, her eyes bright. 'We shall end the chaos, the Christian stupidity.'

'I'm sure you will,' agreed the Russian.

'But never as Moscow's puppets, that we will never be. We are *independents*. We do not listen to vicious bears who would devour us and create a worldwide fascist state. Never!'

'Bravo,' said Bray.

The conversation trailed off, the young woman reluctant to answer further questions about herself. She told them her name was Antonia, but beyond that said little. When Talenickov asked why she, a political activist from Bologna, had returned to this isolated region of Corsica, she replied only that it was to be with her grandmother for a while.

'Tell us about her,' said Scofield.

'She will tell you what she wants you to know,' said the girl, getting up. 'I have told you what she instructed me to say.'

'"The whore of Villa Matarese",' repeated Bray.

'Yes. They are not words I would choose. Or ever use. Come, we have another two hours to walk.'

They reached a flat crown of a mountain and looked down a gentle slope to a valley below. It was no more than a hundred and fifty yards from mountain crest to valley floor, perhaps a mile the basin. The moon had grown progressively brighter; they could see a small farmhouse in the centre of the pasture, a at the end of a short roadway. They could hear the sound of water; a stream flowed out of the mountain near where they stood, tumbling down the slope between a row of rocks, passing within fifty feet of the small house.

'It's very beautiful,' said Talenickov.

'It is the only world she has known for over half a century,' replied Antonia.

'Were you brought up here?' asked Scofield. 'Was this your home?'

'No,' said the girl, without elaborating. 'Come, we will see her. She has been waiting.'

'At this hour of the night?' Talenickov was surprised.

'There is no day or night for my grandmother. She said to

myself was born in Poland . . . northern Poland. I'm sure you detect my imperfect speech.'

'I detect nothing of the sort. Only your lies. However, don't be concerned, it doesn't matter.'

Talenickov and Scofield looked at each other, then over at Antonia, who sat curled up in exhaustion on a pillow in front of the window.

'What doesn't matter?' Bray asked. 'We are concerned. We want you to speak freely.'

'I will,' said the blind woman. 'For your lies are not those of self-seeking men. Dangerous men, perhaps, but not men moved by profit. You do not look for the *padrone* for your own personal gain.'

Scofield could not help himself; he leaned forward. 'How do you know?'

The old woman's vacant yet powerful pale blue eyes held his. 'It was hard to accept the fact that she could not see. 'It is in your voices,' she said. 'You are afraid.'

'Have we reason to be?' asked Talenickov.

'That would depend on what you believe, wouldn't it?'

'We believe a terrible thing has happened,' said Bray. 'But we know very little. That's as honestly as I can put it.'

'What *do* you know, *signori*?'

Again Scofield and Talenickov exchanged glances; the Russian nodded first. Bray realized that Antonia was watching them closely. He spoke as obviously to her as to the old woman. 'Before we answer you, I think it would be better if your grandmother left us alone.'

'No!' said the girl so harshly that Uccello snapped up his head.

'Listen to me,' continued Scofield. 'It's one thing to bring us here, two strangers your grandmother wanted to meet. It's something else again to be involved with us. My . . . associate . . . and have experience in these matters. It's for your own good.'

'Leave us, Antonia.' The blind woman turned in the chair. 'I have nothing to fear from these men and you must be tired. Take Uccello with you; rest in the barn.'

'All right,' said the girl, getting up, 'but Uccello will remain here.' Suddenly, from beneath the pillow, she took out the Luger and levelled it in front of her. 'You both have guns. Throw them on the floor. I don't think you would leave here without them.'

anean sectors, Consular Operations, United States Department of State.'

'I see.' The old courtesan brought her thin hands and delicate fingers up to her face, a gesture of quiet reflection. 'I am not a learned woman, and live an isolated life, but I am not without news of the outside world. I often listen to my radio for hours at a time. The broadcasts from Rome come in quite clearly, as do those from Genoa, and frequently Nice. I pretend no knowledge, for I have none, but your coming to Corsica together would appear strange.'

'It is, madame,' said Taleniekov.

'Very,' agreed Scofield.

'It signifies the gravity of the situation.'

'Then let your associate begin, *signore*.'

Bray sat forward in the chair, his arms on his knees, his eyes on the blind eyes in front of him. 'At some point between the years 1911 and 1913, Guillaume de Matarese summoned a group of men to his estate in Porto Vecchio. Who they were and where they came from has never been established. But they gave themselves a name . . .'

'The date was 4 April 1911,' interrupted the old woman. 'They did not give themselves a name, the *padrone* chose it. They were to be known as the Council of the Matarese . . . Go on, please.'

'You were *there*?'

'Please continue.'

The moment was unsettling; they were talking about an event that had been the object of speculation for decades, with no records of dates or identities, no witnesses. Now – delivered in a brief few seconds – they were told the correct year, the exact month, the precise day.

'*Signore*? . . .'

'Sorry. During the next thirty years or so, this Matarese and his "council" were the subject of controversy . . .' Scofield told the story rapidly, without embellishment, keeping his words in the simplest Italian he knew so there'd be no misunderstanding. He admitted that the majority of experts who had studied the Matarese legend had concluded it was more myth than reality.

'What do *you* believe, *signore*? That is what I asked you at the start.'

'I'm not sure what I believe, but I know a very great man

'The last thing he said to me before I left him was that the answer might be in Corsica. Naturally, I was not convinced of that until subsequent events left no alternative. For either me or my associate, agent Scofield.'

'I understand your associate's reason: a great man disappeared four days ago because he spoke of the Matarese. What was yours, *signore*?'

'I, too, spoke of the Matarese. To those men from whom I sought guidance, and I was a man of credentials in my country. The order was put out for my execution.'

The old woman was silent and, again, there was that slight smile on her wrinkled lips. 'The *padrone* returns,' she whispered.

'I think you must explain that,' said Taleniekov. 'We've been frank with you.'

'Did your dear friend die?' she asked instead, her blind eyes questioning.

'The next day. He was given a soldier's funeral and he was entitled to it. He lived a life of violence without fear. Yet at the end, the Matarese frightened him profoundly.'

'The *padrone* frightened him,' said the old woman.

'My friend did not know Guillaume de Matarese.'

'He knew his disciples. It was enough; they were him. He was their Christ, and as Christ, he died for them.'

'The *padrone* was their god?' asked Bray.

'And their prophet, *signore*. They believed him.'

'Believed what?'

'That they would inherit the earth. That was his vengeance.'

and proper speech, even history and mathematics, as well as the French language which was the fashion of the time for ladies of bearing. It was a wondrous life. We sailed often across the sea on to Rome, then would train north to Switzerland and across into France and to Paris. The padrone made these trips every five or six months. His business holdings were in those places, you see. His two sons were his directors, reporting to him everything they did.

For three years I was the happiest girl in the world for the world was given me by the padrone. And then that world fell apart. In a single week it came crashing down and Guillaume de Matarese went mad.

Men travelled from Zurich and Paris, from as far away as the great exchange in London, to tell him. It was a time of great banking investments and speculation. They said that during the four months that had passed, his sons had done terrible things, made unwise decisions, and most terrible of all had entered into dishonest agreements, committing vast sums of money to dishonourable men who operated outside the laws of banking and the courts. The governments of France and England had seized the companies and stopped all trade, all access to funds. Except for the accounts he held in Genoa and Rome, Guillaume de Matarese had nothing.

He summoned his two sons by wireless, ordering them home to Porto Vecchio to give him an accounting of what they had done. The news that came back to him, however, was like a thunderbolt striking him down in a great storm; he was never the same again.

Word was sent through the authorities in Paris and London that both the sons were dead, one by his own hand, the other killed – it was said – by a man he had ruined. There was nothing left for the padrone; his world had crumbled around him. He locked himself in his library for days on end, never coming out, taking trays of food behind the closed door, speaking to no one. He did not lie with me for he had no interest in matters of the flesh. He was destroying himself, dying by his own hand as surely as if he had taken a knife to his stomach.

Then one day a man came from Paris and insisted on breaking into the padrone's privacy. He was a journalist who had studied the fall of the Matarese companies, and he brought with him an incredible story. If the padrone was driving himself into madness before he heard it, afterwards he was beyond hope.

We returned to Corsica. He composed five letters to five men known to be alive in five countries; inviting them to journey in secrecy to Porto Vecchio on matters of the utmost urgency, matters pertaining to their own personal histories.

He was the once-great Guillaume de Matarese. None refused.

The preparations were magnificent, Villa Matarese made more beautiful than it had ever been. The gardens were sculptured and bursting with colour, the lawns greener than a brown cat's eyes, the great house and the stables washed in white, the horses curried until they glistened. It was a fairyland again, the padrone running everywhere at once, checking all things, demanding perfection. His great vitality had returned, but it was not the vitality we had known before. There was a cruelty in him now. 'Make them remember, my child,' he roared at me in the bedroom. 'Make them remember what once was theirs!'

For he came back to my bed, but his spirit was not the same. There was only brute strength in the performance of his manhood; here was no joy.

If all of us – in the house and the stables and in the fields – knew then what we soon would learn, we would have killed him in the forest. I, who had been given everything by the great padrone, who worshipped him as both father and lover, would have plunged in the knife myself.

The great day came, the ships sailed in at dawn from Lido di Ostia, and the carriages were sent down to Porto Vecchio to bring up the honoured guests to Villa Matarese. It was a glorious day, music in the gardens, enormous tables heaped with delicacies, and much wine. The finest wines from all Europe, stored for decades in the padrone's cellars.

The honoured guests were given their own suites, each with a balcony and a magnificent view, and – not the least – each guest was provided with his own young whore for an afternoon's pleasure. Like the wines they were the finest, not of Europe, but of southern Corsica. Five of the most beautiful virgins to be found in the hills.

Night came and the grandest banquet ever seen at Villa Matarese was held in the great hall. When it was over, the servants placed bottles of brandy in front of the guests and were told to remain in the kitchens. The musicians were ordered to take their instruments to the gardens and continue playing. We girls were asked to go to the upper house to await our masters.

We were flushed with wine, the girls and I, but there was a



They would be chosen carefully, killed in ways that would breed mistrust, pitting political faction against political faction, corrupt government against corrupt government. There would be chaos and bloodshed and the message would be clear: the Matarese existed.

The padrone distributed to each guest pages on which he had written down his thoughts. These writings were to be the council's source of strength and direction, but they were never to be shown to eyes other than their own. These pages were the Last Will and Testament of Guillaume de Matarese . . . and those in that room were his inheritors.

Inheritors? asked the guests. *They were compassionate, but direct. In spite of the villa's beauty and the servants and the musicians and the feast they had enjoyed, they knew he had been ruined — as each of them had been ruined. Who among them had anything left but his wine cellars and his lands and rents from tenants to keep but a semblance of his former life intact? A grand banquet once in a great while, but little else.*

The padrone did not answer them at first. Instead, he demanded to know from each guest whether that man accepted the things he had said, if that man was prepared to become a consigliere of the Matarese.

They replied yes, each more vehement than the last, pledging himself to the padrone's goals, for great evil had been done to each of them and they wanted revenge. It was apparent that Guillaume de Matarese appeared to each at that moment a saint.

Each, except one, a deeply religious Spaniard who spoke of the word of God and of His commandments. He accused the padrone of madness, called him an abomination in the eyes of God.

'Am I an abomination in your eyes, sir?' asked the padrone.

'You are, sir,' replied the man.

Whereupon the first of the most terrible things happened. The padrone took a pistol from his belt, aimed it at the man, and fired. The guests sprang up from their chairs and stared in silence at the dead Spaniard.

'He could not be permitted to leave this room alive,' said the padrone.

As if nothing had happened, the guests returned to their chairs, all eyes on this mightiest of men who could kill with such deliberateness, perhaps afraid for their own lives, it was difficult to tell. The padrone went on.

'All in this room are my inheritors,' he said. 'For you are the

orders of Guillaume de Matarese, now butchered by new commands.

I pressed myself back into the wall in the darkness of the balcony, not knowing what to do, trembling, frightened beyond any fear I could imagine. And then the gunfire stopped, the silence that followed more terrible than the screams for, it was the evidence of death.

Suddenly I could hear running – three or four men, I could not tell – but I knew they were the killers. They were rushing down staircases and through doors, and I thought, Oh, God in heaven, they are looking for me. But they were not. They were racing to a place where all would gather together; it seemed to be the north veranda, I could not be sure, all was happening so fast. Below in the great hall, the four guests were in shock, frozen to their chairs, the padrone holding them in their places by the strength of his glaring eyes.

There came what I thought would be the final sounds of gunfire until my own death. Three shots – only three – between terrible screams. And then I understood. The killers had themselves been killed by a lone man given those orders.

The silence came back. Death was everywhere – in the shadows and dancing on the walls in the flickering candlelight of the great hall. The padrone spoke to his guests.

‘It is over,’ he said. ‘Or nearly over. All but you at this table are dead save one man you will never see again. It is he who will drive you in a shrouded carriage to Bonifacio where you may mingle with the night revellers and take the crowded morning train to Naples. You have fifteen minutes to gather your things and meet on the front steps. There are none to carry your luggage, I’m afraid.’

A guest found his voice, or part of it. ‘And you, padrone?’ he whispered.

‘At the last, I give you my life as your final lesson. Remember me! I am the way. Go forth and become my disciples! Rip out the corruptors and the corrupted!’ He was raving mad, his shouts echoing throughout the great house of death. ‘Entrate!’ he roared.

A small child, a shepherd boy from the hills, walked through the large doors of the north veranda. He held a pistol in his two hands; it was heavy and he was slight. He approached the master.

The padrone raised his eyes to the heavens, his voice to God.

Light broke over the surrounding mountains as pockets of mist floated up from the fields outside the farmhouse. Talenickov found tea, and with the old woman's permission, boiled water on the wood-burning stove.

Scofield sipped from his cup, watching the rippling stream from the window. It was time to talk again; there were too many discrepancies between what the blind woman had told them and the facts as they were assumed to be. But there was a primary question: why had she told them at all? The answer to that might be clear whether any part of her narrative should be believed.

Bray turned from the window and looked at the old woman in the chair by the stove. Talenickov had given her tea and she drank it delicately, as though remembering those lessons in the social graces given a girl of 'ten and seven years of age' decades ago. The Russian was kneeling by the dog, stroking its fur again, reminding it they were friends. He glanced up, as Scofield walked towards the old woman.

'We've told you our names, signora,' said Bray, speaking in Italian. 'What is yours?'

'Sophia Pastorine. If one goes back to look, I'm sure it can be found in the records of the convent at Bonifacio. That is why you ask, is it not? To be able to check?'

'Yes,' answered Scofield. 'If we think it's necessary, and have the opportunity.'

'You will find my name. The *padrone* may even be listed as my

with you. You must promise me that. If they find you, they will not let you live.'

'We know that,' said Bray. 'We want to know why.'

'All the lands of Guillaume de Matarese were willed to the people of the hills. The tenants became the heirs of a thousand fields and pastures, streams and forests. It was so recorded in the courts of Bonifacio and great celebrations were held everywhere. But there was a price, and there were other courts that would take away the lands if that price were known.' The blind Sophia stopped, as if weighing another price, one of betrayal, perhaps.

'Please. Signora Pastorene,' said Taleniekov, leaning forward in the chair.

'Yes,' she answered quietly. 'It must be told . . .'

Everything was to be done quickly for fear of unwanted intruders happening upon the great house of Villa Matarese and the death that was everywhere. The guests gathered their papers and fled to their rooms. I remained in the shadows of the balcony, my body filled with pain, the silent vomit of fear all around me. How long I stayed there, I could not tell, but soon I heard the running feet of the guests racing down the staircase to their appointed meeting place. Then there was the sound of carriage wheels and the neighing of horses; minutes later the carriage sped away, hooves clattering on the hard stone along with the rapid cracking of a whip, all fading away quickly.

I started to crawl towards the balcony door, not able to think, my eyes filled with bolts of lightning, my head trembling so I could barely find my way. I pressed my hands on the wall, wishing here were brackets I could hold on to, when I heard a shout and threw myself to the floor again. It was a terrible shout for it came from a child, and yet it was cold and demanding.

'Attualmente! E presto detto!'

The shepherd boy was screaming at someone from the north erranda. If all was senseless up to that moment, the child's shouts intensified the madness beyond any understanding. For he was a child . . . and a killer.

Somehow I rose to my feet and ran through the door to the top of the staircase. I was about to run down, wanting only to get away, into the air and the fields and the protection of darkness, when I heard other shouts and saw the figures of running men through the windows. They were carrying torches, and in seconds crashed through the doors.

were far up in the wooded hills, but not in the mountains. Nothing was familiar to me. We were far, far away from Villa Matarese, but where I could not tell you then and cannot tell you now.

The last of the nightmare began. Our bodies were pulled off the wagons and thrown into a common grave, each corpse held by two men so that they could hurl it into the deepest part. I fell in pain, my teeth sinking into my fingers to keep my mind from crossing into madness. I opened my eyes and the vomit came again at what I saw. All around me dead faces, limp arms, gaping mouths. Stabbed, bleeding carcasses that only hours ago had been human beings.

The grave was enormous, wide and deep – and strangely, it seemed to me in my silent hysteria, shaped in the form of a circle.

Beyond the edge I could hear the voices of our gravediggers. Some were weeping, while others cried out to Christ for mercy. Several were demanding that the blessed sacraments be given to the dead, that for the sake of all their souls, a priest be brought to the place of death and intercede with God. But other men said no, they were not the killers, merely those chosen to put the slain to rest. God would understand.

‘Basta!’ they said. It could not be done. It was the price they paid for the good of generations yet to be born. The hills were theirs; the fields and streams and forests belonged to them! There was no turning back now. They had made their pact with the padrone; and he had made it clear to the elders: Only the government’s knowledge of a *conspirazione* could take the lands away

Guillaume de Matarese, he accepted her as his own, giving us both love and protection through the days of his life. Those years and our lives during those years are no concern of yours, they do not pertain to the padrone. It is enough to say that no harm came to us. For years we lived far north in Vescovato, away from the danger of the hill people, never daring to mention their secret. The dead could not be brought back, you see, and the killer and his killer son – the man and the shepherd boy – had fled Corsica.

I have told you the truth, all of it. If you still have doubts, I cannot put them to rest.

Again she had finished.

Taleniekov got up and walked slowly to the stove and the pot of tea. '*Peru nostro circolo,*' he said, looking at Scofield. 'Almost seventy years have passed and still they would kill for their grave.'

'*Perdon?*' The old woman did not understand English, so the KGB man repeated his statement in Italian. Sophia nodded. 'The secret goes from father to son. These are the two generations that have been born since the land was theirs. It is not so long. They are still afraid.'

'There aren't any laws that could take it from them,' said Bray. 'I doubt there ever were. Men might have been sent to prison for withholding information about the massacre; but in those days, who would prosecute? They buried the dead, that was their conspiracy.'

'There was a greater conspiracy. They did not permit the blessed sacraments.'

'That's another court. I don't know anything about it.' Scofield glanced at the Russian, then brought his eyes back to the blind eyes in front of him. 'Why did you come back?'

'I was able to. And I was old when we found this valley.'

'That's not an answer.'

'The people of the hills believe a lie. They think the *padrone* spared me, sent me away before the guns began. To others I am a source of fear and hatred. It is whispered that I was spared by God to be a remembrance of their sin, yet blinded by God so as never to reveal their grave in the forests. I am the blind whore of Villa Matarese, permitted to live because they are afraid to take the life of God's reminder.'

"You and *yours* will do what I can no longer do." The old woman stopped, her blind eyes swimming, then began again; her sentences rushed in fear.

'It was true! They *had* survived – not the council as it was then but as it is today. "You and yours." The *yours* had survived! Let by the one man whose voice was crueller than the wind.' Sophia Pastorine abruptly stopped again, her frail, delicate hand grasping for the wooden arm of her chair. She stood up and with her left hand reached for her cane by the edge of the stove.

'The list. You must have it, *signori*! I took it out of a blood-soaked gown almost seventy years ago after crawling out of the grave in the mountains. It had stayed next to my body through the terror. I had carried it with me so I would not forget their names and their titles, to make my *padrone* proud of me.' The old woman tapped the cane in front of her as she walked across the room to a primitive shelf on the wall. Her right hand felt the edge, her fingers hesitantly dancing among the various jars until she found the one she wanted. She removed the clay top, reached inside, and pulled out a scrap of soiled paper, yellow with age. She turned. 'It is yours. Names from the past. This is the list of honoured guests who journeyed in secrecy to Villa Matarese on the fourth of April, in the year nineteen hundred and eleven. I do this by giving it to you I do a terrible thing, may God have mercy on my soul.'

Scofield and Taleniekov were on their feet. 'You haven't,' said Bray. 'You've done the right thing.'

'The only thing,' added Vasili. He touched her hand. 'May I?' He released the faded scrap of paper; the Russian studied. 'It's the key,' he said to Scofield. 'It's also quite beyond anything we might have expected.'

'Why?' asked Bray.

'Two of these names will startle you. To say the least, they are prominent. Here.' Taleniekov crossed to Scofield, holding the paper delicately between two fingers so as not to damage it further. Bray took it in the palm of his hand.

'I don't believe it,' said Scofield, reading the names. 'I'd like to get this analysed to make sure it wasn't written five days ago.'

'It wasn't,' said the KGB man.

'I know. And that scares the hell out of me.'

'*Perdoni?*' Sophia Pastorine stood by the shelf. Bray answered her in Italian.

'But they saw you the day before,' said Sophia Pastorine, interrupting again.

'Yes. I bought the things you wanted.'

'Then why would you come back?' The old woman spoke rhetorically. 'That is what they tried to understand, and they did. They are men of the hills; they look down at the grass and the dirt and see that three people travelled over the ground, not one. You must leave. All of you!'

'I will not do that, grandmother!' cried Antonia. 'They won't harm us. I'll say I may have been followed, but I know nothing.'

The old woman stared straight ahead. 'You have what you came for, *signori*. Take it. Take her. Leave!'

Bray turned to the girl. 'We owe her that,' he said. He grabbed the shotgun out of her hands. She tried to fight back but Taleniev pinned her arms and removed the Browning and the Graz-Burya automatics from her pockets. 'You saw what happened down there,' continued Scofield. 'Do as she says.'

The dog raced to the open door and barked viciously. Far in the distance, voices were carried on the morning breezes; men were shouting to others behind them.

'Go!' said Sophia Pastorine.

'Come on.' Bray propelled Antonia in front of him. 'We'll be back after they've left. We haven't finished.'

'A moment, *signori*!' shouted the blind woman. 'I think we have finished. The names you possess may be helpful to you, but they are only the inheritors. Look for the one whose voice is louder than the wind. I heard it! Find him. The shepherd boy. Is he!'

They ran along the edge of the pasture on the border of the woods and climbed to the top of the ridge.

The shadows of the eastern slope kept them from being seen. There had been only a few seconds when they might have been spotted; they were prepared for that but it did not happen. The men on the opposite ridge were distracted by a barking dog, deciding whether or not to use their rifles on it. They did not, for the dog was retrieved by a whistle before such a decision could be made. Uccello was beside Antonia now in the grass, his breath coming as rapidly as hers.

There were four men on the opposite ridge – as there were four names on the scrap of yellow paper in his pocket, thought Scofield. He wished finding them, trapping *them*, were as easy as trapping and picking off the four men who now descended into the valley. But the four men on the list were just the beginning.

There was a shepherd boy to find. 'A voice crueller than the wind' . . . a *child's* voice recognized decades later as one and the same . . . coming over the air waves from the throat of what had to be a very, very old man.

I heard the words and it was as though time had no meaning . . .

What were those words? Who was that *man*? The true descendant of Guillaume de Matarese . . . an old man who phrase that peeled away seventy years from the mere blind woman in the mountains of *Mexico*. In what *language* had to be French or Italian; she

They had to speak with her again; they had to understand far more. They had *not* finished with Sophia Pastorine.

Bray watched as the four Corsicans approached the farmhouse, two covering the sides, two walking up to the door, all with weapons drawn. The men by the door paused for an instant; then the one on the left raised his boot and rammed it into the wood, crashing the door inward.

Silence.

Two shouts were heard, questions asked harshly. The men outside ran around opposite corners of the farmhouse and went inside. There was more shouting . . . and the unmistakable sound of flesh striking flesh.

Antonia started to get up, fury on her face. Taleniekov pulled her down by the shoulder of her field jacket. The muscles in her throat were pronounced; she was about to scream – Scofield had no choice. He clamped his hand over her mouth, forcing his fingers into her cheeks; the scream was reduced to a series of coughs.

'Be quiet!' whispered Bray. 'If they hear you, they'll use her to get you down there!'

'It would be far worse for her,' said Vasili, 'and for you. You would hear her pain, and they would take you.'

Antonia's eyes blinked; she nodded. Scofield relieved his grip, but did not release it. She whispered through his hand. 'They hit her! A blind woman and they hit her!'

'They're frightened,' said Taleniekov. 'More than you can imagine. Without their land, they have nothing.'

The girl's fingers gripped Bray's wrist. 'What do you mean?'

'Not now!' commanded Scofield. 'There's something wrong. They're staying in there too long.'

'They've found something, perhaps,' agreed the KGB man.

'Or she's telling them something, Oh, *Christ*, she can't!'

'What are you thinking?' asked Taleniekov.

'She said we'd finished. We *haven't*. But she's going to make sure of it! They'll see our footprints on the floor; we walked over wet ground; she can't deny we were there. With her hearing, she knows which way we went. She'll send them in another direction.'

'That's fine,' said the Russian.

'Goddamn it, they'll *kill* her!'

Taleniekov snapped his head back towards the farmhouse.

below. 'You're right,' he said. 'If they believe her - and they will - they can't let her live. She's the source; she'll tell them that, too, if only to convince them. Her life for the shepherd boy. So we can find the shepherd boy!'

'But we don't *know* enough! Come on, let's go!' Scofield got to his feet, yanking the automatic from his belt. The dog snarled; the girl rose and Talniekov pushed her down to the ground again.

They were not in time. Three gunshots followed one upon the other.

Antonia screamed; Bray lunged, holding her, cradling her. 'Please, please!' he whispered. He saw the Russian pull a knife from somewhere inside his coat. 'No! It's all right!'

Talniekov palmed the knife and knelt down, his eyes on the farmhouse below. 'They're running outside. You were right; they're heading for the south slope.'

'Kill them!' The girl's words were muffled by Scofield's hand.

'To what purpose now?' said the KGB man. 'She did what she wished to do, what she felt she had to do.'

The dog would not follow them, commands from Antonia had no effect. It raced down into the farmhouse and would not come out; its whining seemed up there.

'Goo I will come back for you'

They walked out of the mountains, circling north-west beyond the hills of Porto Vecchio, then south to Sainte Lucie, following the stream until they reached the massive pine under which Bray had buried his attaché case and duffelbag. They travelled cautiously, using the woods as much as possible, separating and walking in sequence across open stretches so no one would see them together.

Scofield pulled the shovel from beneath a pile of branches, dug up his belongings, and they started out again, retracing the stream north towards Sainte Lucie. Conversation was kept to a minimum; they wasted no time putting distance between themselves and the hills.

The long silences and brief separations served a practical purpose, thought Bray, watching the girl as she pressed forward, bewildered, following their commands without thinking, tears intermittently appearing in her eyes. The constant movement occupied her view; she had to come to some sort of acceptance of

her 'grandmother's' death. No words from relative strangers could help her; she needed the loneliness of her own thoughts. Scofield suspected that in spite of her handling of the Lupo Antonia was not a child of violence. She was no child to begin with; in the daylight he could see that she would not see thirty again, but beyond that, she came from a world of radical academics, not revolution. He doubted she would know what to do at the barricades.

'We must stop *running*!' she cried suddenly. 'You may do what you like, but I am returning to Porto Vecchio. I'll see them *hanged*!'

'There's a great deal you don't know,' said Taleniekov.

'She was killed! That is all I *have* to know!'

'It's not that simple,' said Bray. 'The truth is she killed herself.'

'*They* killed her!'

'She forced them to.' Scofield took her hand, gripping it firmly. 'Try to understand me. We can't let you go back; your grandmother knew that. What happened during the past forty-eight hours has got to fade away just as fast as possible. There'll be a certain amount of panic up in those hills; they'll send men trying to find us, but in several weeks when nothing happens, they'll cool off. They'll live with their own fears but they'll be quiet. It's the only thing they can do. Your grandmother understood that. She counted on it.'

'But *why*?'

'Because we have other things to do,' said the Russian. 'She understood that, too. It's why she sent you back to find us.'

'What are these things?' asked Antonia, then answered for herself. 'She said you had names. She spoke of a shepherd boy.'

'But you must speak of neither,' ordered Taleniekov. 'Not if you wish her death to mean anything. We cannot let you interfere.'

Scofield caught the sound in the KGB man's voice and for an instant found himself reaching for his gun. In that split second, the memory of Berlin ten years ago was prodded to the surface. Taleniekov had already made a decision: If the Russian had the slightest doubt, he would kill this girl.

'She won't interfere,' said Bray, without knowing why he gave such a guarantee, but delivering it firmly. 'Let's go. We'll make one stop; I'll see a man in Murato. Then if we can reach Bastia, I can get us out.'

justice that should be done; you can't give me orders any longer.'

The KGB man looked at Scofield, his intent in his eyes. Bray expected the Russian to draw his weapon. He wondered briefly what his own reaction would be; he could not tell. But the moment passed, and Scofield understood something he had not fully understood before. Vasili Taleniekov did not wish to kill, but the professional in him was in strong conflict with the man. The Russian was pleading with him. He wanted to know how to convert a liability into an asset. Scofield wished he knew.

'Take it easy,' said Bray. 'Nobody wants to tell you what to do except where your own safety's concerned. We said that before and it's ten times more valid now.'

'I think it is something else. You wish me to stay silent. *Silent* over the killing of a blind, old woman!'

'Your safety depends on it, we told you that. She understood.'
'She's dead!'

'But you want to live,' insisted Scofield calmly. 'If the hill people find you, you won't. And if it's known that you've talked to others, they'll be in danger, too. Can't you see that?'

'Then what am I to do?'

'Just what we're doing. Disappear. Get out of Corsica.' The girl started to object; Bray cut her off. 'And *trust* us. You *must* trust us. Your grandmother did. She did so we could live and find some people who are involved in terrible things that go beyond Corsica.'

'You are not talking to a child. What do you mean "terrible things"?'

Bray glanced at Taleniekov, accepting his disapproval, but by adding, overriding it. 'There are men - we don't know how many - whose lives are committed to killing other men, who spread mistrust and suspicion by choosing victims and financing murder. There's no pattern except violence, *political* violence, pitting faction against faction, government against government . . . people against people.' Scofield paused, seeing the concentration in Antonia's face. 'You said you were a political activist, a communist. Fine. Good. So's my associate here; he was trained in Moscow. I'm an American, trained in Washington. We're enemies; we've fought each other a long time. The details aren't important, but the fact that we're working together now is. The men we're trying to find are much more dangerous than any difference between us, between our governments. Because

up to something, testing the girl as he did so.

'Then what is the choice?' continued Antonia. 'To let one of the other of your governments put me away, until you have found the men you seek?'

'I'm afraid that's not possible,' said Talenickov. 'We're acting outside our governments; we do not have their approval. To put it frankly, they seek us as intensely as we seek the men we spoke of.'

The girl reacted to the Russian's startling information although struck. 'You're hunted by your own people?' she asked.

Talenickov nodded.

'I see. I understand clearly now. You will not accept my word and you cannot imprison me. Therefore I am a threat to you – far more than I imagined. So I have *no* choice, do I?'

'You may have,' replied the KGB man. 'My associate mentioned it.'

'What was that?'

'Trust us. Help us get to Bastia and trust us. Something may come of it.' Talenickov turned to Scofield and spoke one word. 'Conduit.'

'We'll see,' said Bray, removing his hand from his belt. They were thinking along the same lines.

The State Department contact in Murato was not happy; he did not want the complication he was faced with. As an owner of fishing boats in Bastia he wrote reports on Soviet naval manoeuvres for the Americans. Washington paid him well and

Washington had cabled *alerts* to stations everywhere that Brandon Alan Scofield, former specialist in Consular Operations, was to be considered a defector. Under such a classification the rules were clear: Take into custody, if possible, but if custody was out of the question, employ all feasible measures for dispatch.

Silvio Montefiori wondered briefly if such a course of action was worth a try. But he was a practical man and in spite of the temptation he rejected the idea. Scofield had the proverbial knife to Montefiori's mouth, yet there was some honey on the blade. If Silvio refused the American's request, his activities would be exposed to the *Soviets*. Yet if Silvio acceded to Scofield's wishes, the defector promised him ten thousand dollars. And ten thousand dollars – even with the poor rate of exchange – was probably more than any bonus he might receive for Scofield's death.

the destinations known only to the captains and ourselves.'

'So many complications, my friend! They are not necessary, you have my word!'

'And I'll treasure it, Silvio, but while it's locked in my heart, do as I say.'

'Naturally!' said Montefiori, swallowing. 'But you must realize how this will add to my costs.'

'Then they should be covered, shouldn't they?'

'It gladdens me you understand.'

'Oh, I do, Silvio.' The American peeled off a number of very large bills. 'For starters, I want you to know that your activities on behalf of Washington will never be revealed by me; that in itself is a considerable payment, if you place any value on your life. And I want you to have this. It's five thousand dollars.' Scofield held out the money.

'My dearest fellow, you said *ten* thousand! It was on your word that I prepared my very expensive arrangements!' Perspiration oozed from Montefiori's pores. Not only was his relationship with the Department of State in untenable jeopardy, but this pig of a traitor was about to steal him blind!

'I haven't finished, Silvio. You're much too anxious. I know I said ten thousand and you'll have it. That leaves five thousand due you, without figuring in your additional expenses. Is that right?'

'Quite right,' said the Corsican. 'The expenses are murderous.'

'So much is these days,' agreed Bray. 'Let's say . . . fifteen per cent above the original price, is that satisfactory?'

'With others I might argue, but never with you.'

'Then we'll settle for an additional fifteen hundred, okay? That leaves a total of six thousand, five hundred coming to you.'

'That is a troublesome phrase. It implies a future delivery and my expenses are current. They cannot be put off.'

'Come on, old friend. Certainly someone of your reputation can be trusted for a few days.'

'A few days, Brandon? Again, so vague. A "few days" and you could be in Singapore. Or Moscow. Can you be more specific?'

'Sure. The money will be in one of your trawlers, I haven't decided which yet. It'll be under the forward bulkhead, to the right of the centre strut, and hidden in a hollow piece of stained wood attached to the ribbing. You'll find it easily.'

to which she could be sent. She would be their conduit or an act of sheer, cold necessity would take place.

They needed someone to relay messages between them. They could not communicate directly; it was too dangerous. There had to be a third party, stationed in one spot, under cover, familiar with whatever basic codes they mounted – above all secretive and accurate. Was Antonia capable of being that person? And if she was, would she accept the risks that went with the job? So they studied her as if thrown into a crash-analysis of an impending exchange between enemies on neutral ground.

She was quick and had surface courage, qualities they had seen in the hills. She was also alert, conscious of danger. Yet she remained an enigma; her core eluded them. She was defensive, guarded, quiet for long periods, her eyes darting in all directions at once as though she expected a whip to crack across her back, or a hand to grab her throat from the shadows behind. But there were no whips, no shadows in the sunlight.

Antonia was a very strange woman and it occurred to both professionals that she was hiding something. Whatever it was – if it was – she was not about to reveal it. The moments of rest provided nothing; she kept to herself – intensely to herself – and refused to be drawn out.

But she did what they had asked her to do. She got them to Bastia without incident, even to the point of knowing where to flag down a broken-down bus that carried labourers from the outskirts into the port city. Talenickov sat with Antonia in the front while Scofield remained at the rear, watching the other passengers.

They emerged on the crowded streets, Bray still behind them, still watching, still alert for a break in the pattern of surrounding indifference. A face suddenly rigid, a pair of eyes zeroing in on the erect, middle-aged man walking with the dark-haired woman thirty paces ahead. There was only indifference.

He had told the girl to head for a bar on the waterfront, a rundown hole where no one dared intrude on a fellow drinker. Even most *Corsi* avoided the place; it served the dregs of the tiers.

Once inside, they separated again, Talenickov joining Bray at a table in the corner, Antonia ten feet away at another table, the chair next to her angled against the edge, reserved. It did nothing to inhibit the drunken advances of the customers. These,

but Scofield's mind and his eyes were not playing tricks with his memories now; he was not in a cave on the side of a hill watching a woman toss her hair free in the light of a fire. There was no similarity between his wife and Antonia any longer. He could kill her if he had to. 'She'll go with me, then,' he said to the Russian. 'I'll know in forty-eight hours. Our first communication will be direct; the next two through her in prearranged code so we can check the accuracy . . . If we want her and she says she'll do it.'

'And if we do not, or she does not?'

'That'll be my decision, won't it.' Bray made a statement; he did not ask a question. Then he took out the leaf of lettuce from his jacket pocket and opened it. The yellowed scrap of paper was intact, the names blurred but legible. Without looking down, Taleniev repeated them.

'"Count Alberto Scozzi, Rome. Sir John Waverly, London. Prince Andrei Voroshin, St Petersburg" – the name Russia is added, and, of course, the city is now Leningrad. "Señor Manuel Ortiz Ortega, Madrid. Josus" – which is presumed to be Joshua – "Appleton, State of Massachusetts, America." The Spaniard was killed by the *padrone* at Villa Matarese, so he was never part of the council. The remaining four have long since died, but two of their descendants are very prominent, very available. David Waverly and Joshua Appleton the fourth. Britain's Foreign Secretary and the senator from Massachusetts. I say we go for immediate confrontation.'

'I don't,' said Bray, looking down at the paper and the child-writing of the letters. 'Because we do know who they are, and we don't know anything about the others. Who are their descendants? Where are they? If there're more surprises, let's try to find them first. The Matarese isn't restricted to two men, and these two in particular may have nothing to do with it.'

'Why do you say that?'

'Everything I know about both of them would seem to deny anything like the Matarese. Waverly had what they call in England a "good war"; a young commando, highly decorated. Then a hell of a record in the Foreign Office. He's always been a tactical compromiser, not an inciter; it doesn't fit . . . Appleton's a Boston Brahmin who bolted the class lines and became a liberal reformer for three terms in the Senate. Protector of the working man as well as the intellectual community. He's a shining knight



'Severe arthritis has caused indisposition.'

'Let's work out our codes,' said Bray, glancing at Antonia, who was smoking a cigarette and talking to a young Bastian soldier standing next to her. She was handling herself well; she laughed politely but coolly, putting a gentle distance between herself and the impertinent young man. In truth, there was more than a hint of elegance in her behaviour, out of place in the waterfront café, but welcome to the eyes. His eyes, reflected Scofield, without thinking further.

'What do you think will happen?' asked Talenickov, watching Bray.

'I'll know in forty-eight hours,' Scofield said.

The trawler approached the Italian coastline. The winter seas had been turbulent, the cross-currents angry and the boat slow; it had been the last time the train from Bastia. be lowered

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seclusion to try to learn more about Antonia Gravel - for that unexpectedly was her last name, her father having been a French artillery sergeant stationed in Corsica during the Second World War.

'So you see,' she had told him, the curve of a smile on her lips, 'my French lessons were very inexpensive. It was only necessary to anger papa, who was never comfortable with my mother's Cismontan Italian.'

Except for those moments when her mind wandered back to Porto Vecchio, a change had come over her. She began to laugh, her brown eyes matching the laughter, bright, infectious, at times nearly manic, as if the act of laughing itself were a release she needed. It was almost impossible for Scofield to realize that the girl sitting next to him, dressed in khaki trousers and a torn field jacket, was the same woman who had been responsive. Or who had shouted orders in the Lupo so effectively. They had se

into the lifeboat, so he asked her about it. The Lupo, not the sudden laughter.

'I went through a phase; we all do, I think. A time when drastic social change seems only possible through violent activism. Those maniacs from the *Brigate Rosse* knew how to play upon our dramatics.'

'The Brigades? You were with the *Red Brigades*? Good God!

She nodded. 'I spent several weeks at a *Brigatisti* camp in Medicina, learning how to fire weapons, and scale walls and hide contraband - none of which I did particularly well, incidentally - until one morning when a young student, a boy, really, was killed in what the leaders called a "training accident". A *training accident*, such a *military* sound, but they were not soldiers. Only brutes and bullies, let loose with knives and guns. He died in my arms, the blood flowing from his wound . . . his eyes so frightened and bewildered. I hardly knew him but when he died, I couldn't stand it. Guns and knives and clubs were not the way; that night I left and returned to Bologna.'

'So what you saw in Porto Vecchio did not settle that question, have we settled ours?'

'What question?'

'Where I'm going. You and the Russian said I was to trust you, do as you were doing, leave Corsica and say nothing. Well, *signore*, we've left Corsica and I've trusted you. I didn't run away.'

'Why didn't you?'

Antonia paused briefly. 'Fear, and you know it. You're not usual men. You speak courteously, but you move too quickly for courteous men. The two don't go together. I think underneath you are what the crazy people in the *Brigate Rosse* would like to be. You frighten me.'

'That stopped you?'

'The Russian wanted to kill me. He watched me closely; he would have shot me the instant he thought I was running.'

'Actually, he didn't want to kill you and he wouldn't have. He was just sending a message.'

'I don't understand.'

'You don't have to, you were perfectly safe.'

'Am I safe now? Will you take my word that I will say nothing and let me go?'

'Where to?'

Gravel. 'Come on. I've had easier people to deal with.'

The statement was true. He could kill this woman if he had to. Still, he would try not to have to.

Where was the new life for Beowulf Agate now?

God, he hated this one.

Bray hired a taxi in Fiumicino, the driver at first reluctant to accept a fare to Rome, changing his mind instantly at the sight of the money in Scofield's hand. They stopped for a quick meal and still reached the inner city before eight o'clock. The streets were crowded, the shops doing a brisk evening's business.

'Pull up in that parking space,' said Bray to the driver. They were in front of a clothing store. 'Wait here,' he added, including Antonia in the command. 'I'll guess your size.' He opened the door.

'What are you doing?' asked the girl.

'A transition,' replied Scofield in English. 'You can't walk into a decent shop dressed like that.'

Five minutes later he returned carrying a box containing denim slacks, a white blouse and a woollen sweater. 'Put these on,' he said.

'You're mad!'

'Modesty becomes you, but we're in a hurry. The stores'll be in an hour. I've got things to wear; you don't.' He turned to the driver, whose eyes were riveted on the rear-view mirror. 'I understand English better than I thought,' he said in Italian. 'We're around. I'll tell you where to go.' He opened his duffelbag and pulled out a tweed jacket.

Antonia changed in the back seat of the taxi, glancing frequently at Scofield. As she slipped the khakis off and the denims on, her long legs caught the light of the streets. Bray looked out the window, conscious of being affected by what he saw in the corner of his eye. He had not had a woman in a very long time; he would not have this one. It was entirely possible that he might have to kill her.

She pulled the sweater over her blouse; the loose-fitting wool did not conceal the swell of her breasts and Scofield made it a point to focus his eyes on hers. 'That's better. Phase one complete.'

'You're very generous, but these would not have been my choice.'

'You can throw them away in an hour. If anyone asks you, you're off a charter boat in Ladispoli.' He addressed the driver again. 'Go to the Via de Condotti. I'll pay you there; we won't need you any longer.'

The shop on the Via de Condotti was expensive, catering to the idle and the rich, and it was obvious that Antonia Gravet had never been in one like it. Obvious to Bray; he doubted to anyone else. For she had innate taste – born, not cultivated. She might have been bursting at the sight of the wealth of garments displayed, but she was the essence of control. It was the elegance Bray had seen in the filthy waterfront café in Bastia.

'Do you like it?' she asked, coming out of a fitting room in a subdued, dark silk dress, a wide-brimmed white hat and a pair of high-heeled white shoes.

'Very nice,' said Scofield, meaning it, and her, and everything he saw.

'I feel like a traitor to all the things I've believed for so long,' she added, whispering. 'These prices could feed ten families for a month! Let's go somewhere else.'

'We don't have time. Take them and get some kind of coat and anything else you need.'

'You *are* mad.'

'I'm in a hurry.'

From a booth on the Via Sistina, he called a *pensione* in the Piazza Navona where he stayed frequently when in Rome. The landlord and his wife knew nothing at all about Scofield – they were not curious about any of their transient tenants – except that Bray tipped generously whenever they accommodated him. The owner was happy to do so tonight.

The Piazza Navona was crowded, it was always crowded, thus making it an ideal location for a man in his profession. The Bernini statues and fountains were magnets for citizens and tourists alike, the profusion of outdoor cafés places of assignation, planned and spontaneous; Scofield's had always been planned. A table in a crowded square was a good vantage point for spotting surveillance. It was not necessary to be concerned about such details.

the death of the woman at his side whom he guided through

Navona to an old stone building and the door of the *pensione*.

The ceiling of their room was high, the windows enormous, opening onto the square three storeys below. Bray pushed the overstuffed sofa against the door and pointed to the bed across the room.

'Neither of us slept very much on that damned boat. Get some rest.'

Antonia opened one of the boxes from the shop in the Via de Condotti and took out the fine silk dress. 'Why did you buy me these expensive clothes?'

'Tomorrow we're going to a couple of places where you'll need them.'

'Why are we going to these places? They must surely be extravagant.'

'Not really. There are some people I have to see, and I want you with me.'

'I wanted to thank you. I've never had such beautiful clothes.'

'You're welcome.' Bray went over to the bed and removed the spread; he returned to the sofa. 'Why did you leave Bologna and go to Corsica?'

'More questions,' she said quietly.

'I'm just curious, that's all.'

'I told you. I wanted to get away for a while. Is that not a good reason?'

'That's not much of an explanation.'

'It's the one I prefer to give.' She studied the dress in her hands.

Scofield slapped the spread over the sofa. 'Why Corsica?'

'You saw that valley. It is remote, peaceful. A good place to think.'

'It's certainly remote; that makes it a good place to hide out. Were you hiding from someone - or something?'

'Why do you say things like that?'

'I have to know. Were you hiding?'

'Not from anything you would understand.'

'Try me.'

'Stop it!' Antonia held the dress out for him. 'Take the clothes. Take anything you want from me, I can't stop. Leave me alone.'

Bray approached her. For the first time he saw her eyes. 'I think you'd better tell me what you're thinking about. I'll talk about B'

it was a lie. You wouldn't go back there even if you could. Why?'

She stared at him for a moment, her brown eyes glistening. When she began, she turned away, and walked to the window overlooking the Piazza Navona. 'You might as well know, it doesn't matter any longer . . . You're wrong I can go back; they expect me back. And if I do not return, one day they will come looking for me.'

'Who?'

'The leaders of the Red Brigades. I told you on the boat how I had run away from the camp in Medicina. That was over a year ago and for over a year I have lived a lie far greater than the one I told you. They found me, and I was put on trial in the Red Court - they call it the Red Court of Revolutionary Justice. Sentences of death are not mere phrases, they are very real executions, as the world knows now.'

'I had not been indoctrinated, yet knew the location of the camp and had witnessed the death of the boy. Most damaging, I had run away I couldn't be trusted. Of course, I didn't matter compared to the objectives of the revolution; they said I had proved myself less than insignificant. A traitor.'

'I saw what was coming, so I pleaded for my life I claimed that I had been the student's lover, and that my reaction - although perhaps not admirable - was understandable I stressed that I had said nothing to *anyone* let alone the police I was as committed

groups are organized. There is always a cadre of strong men, and one or two among these who vie for leadership, like male wolves in a pack - snarling, dominating, choosing their various mates at will, for that is part of the domination. A man such as this wanted me among the women. He was probably the most vicious of the pack; the others were frightened of him - and so was I.

'But he could save my life, and I made my choice. I lived with him for over a year, hating every day, despising the nights he took me loathing myself . . .

away . . . their favourite method of execution.' Antonia turned

from the window. 'You asked me why I did not run from you and the Russian. Perhaps you understand better now; the conditions of my survival were not new to me. To run away meant death; to run away from you means death now. I was a captive in Bologna, I became a captive in Porto Vecchio . . . and I am a captive now in Rome.' She paused then spoke again. 'I am tired of you all. I can't stand it much longer. The moment will come, and I will run . . . and you will shoot.' She held out the dress again. 'Take your clothes, Signore Scofield. I am faster in a pair of trousers.'

Bray did not move, nor did he object by gesture or voice. He almost smiled, but he could not do that, either. 'I'm glad to hear that your sense of fatalism doesn't include intentional suicide. I mean, you *do* expect to give us a "run".'

'You may count on it.' She dropped the dress on the floor.

'I won't kill you, Antonia.'

She laughed quietly, derisively. 'Oh, yes, you will. You and the Russian are the worst kind. In Bologna, they kill with fire in their eyes, and mouthing slogans. You kill without anger . . . you need no inner urging.'

I once did. You get over it. There's no compulsion, only necessity. Please don't talk about these things. The way you've lived is your stay of execution; that's all you need to know.

'I won't argue with you. I didn't say I couldn't - or wouldn't - I only said I won't. I'm trying to tell you, you don't have to run.' The girl frowned. 'Why?'

'Because I need you.' Scofield knelt down and picked up the dress. He took her hand gently and gave it back to her. 'All I've got to do is convince you that you need me.'

'To save my life?'

'To give it back to you, at any rate. In what form, I'm not sure, but better than before. Without the fear, eventually.'

'"Eventually" is a long time. Why should I believe you?'

'I don't think you have a choice. I can't give you any other answer until I know more, but let's start with the fact that the *Brigatisti* aren't confined to Bologna. You said if you didn't go back, they'd come looking for you. Their . . . packs . . . roam all over Italy. How long can you keep hiding until they find you - if they want to find you badly enough?'

'I could have for years in Corsica. In Porto Vecchio. They would never find me.'

in the hills gave us the first concrete information to go on. She gave up what was left of her life to give it to us. She was blind but she saw it . . . because she was there when it began.'

'Words!'

'Facts. Names.'

A sound. Not part of the hum from the square below, but beyond the door blocked by the sofa. All sounds were part of a pattern, or distinctly their own; this was its own. A footstep, a shifting of weight, a scratch of leather against stone. Bray brought his index finger to his lips, then gestured for Antônia to move to the left end of the sofa while he walked quickly to the right. She was bewildered; she had heard nothing. He motioned for her to help him lift the sofa away from the door. Smoothly, silently.

It was done.

Scofield waved her back into the corner, took out his Browning and resumed a normal conversational tone as he inched his way to the door, his face turned away from it.

'It's not too crowded in the restaurants. Let's go down to *Tre Scalini* for some food. God knows I could use . . .'

He pulled the door open; there was no one in the hallway. Yet he had not been mistaken; he knew what he had heard; the years had taught him not to *make* mistakes about such things. And the years had also taught him when to be furious with himself over his own carelessness. Since Fiumicino he had been careless, disregarding the probability of surveillance. Rome was a low-priority station; since the heavy traffic four years ago, CIA, *Cons Op* and KGB activity had been held to a minimum. It had been over eleven months since he had been in the city, and the scanner sheets then had shown no agents of status in operation there. If anything Rome had lessened in intelligence potential during the past year; who could be around?

Someone was and he had been spotted. Someone moments ago had been close to the door, listening, trying to confirm a sighting. The sudden break in conversation had served to warn whoever it was, but he was there, somewhere in the shadows of the squared-off hallway or on the staircase.

Goddamn it, thought Bray angrily as he walked silently around the landing, had he forgotten that alerts had been sent to every station in the world by now? He was a *fugitive* and he had

been careless. Where had he been picked up? In the Via de Condotti? Crossing the Navona?

He heard a rush of air, and even as he heard it, his instinct told him he was too late to react. He stiffened his body as he spun to his right, lunging downward to lessen the impact of the blow.

A door behind him had suddenly been yanked open and a figure that was only a blur above his back rushed out, an arm held high, but only for an instant. It came crashing down, the sickening bolt of pain spreading from the base of his skull throughout his chest, surging downward into his kneecaps where it settled, bringing on the wind of collapse and darkness.

He blinked his eyes, tears of blunt hurt filling them, disorienting him, but somehow providing a measure of relief. How many minutes had he been lying on the hallway floor? He could not tell, yet he sensed it was not long; his mouth was not filled with the dried spit which accompanied any lengthy period of breathing in pain. He rose slowly and looked at his watch, focusing on the dial in the dim light.

He had been out for roughly fifteen minutes, had he not twisted the instant before impact, the elapsed time would have been closer to an hour.

Why was he *there*? Alone? Where was his captor? It did not make sense! He had been taken, then left by himself. What was his capture *for*?

He heard a muted cry, quickly cut off, and turned towards the source, bewildered. Then the cry came again, fainter, more distant.

He peered down at the floor around him. His Browning was gone, naturally, and he had no other weapon. But he had something else. Consciousness. His assailant would not expect that — the man had known precisely where to hammer the butt of his gun; in his mind his victim would be unconscious far longer than the few minutes involved. Drawing that man out was not a significant problem.

Bray walked noiselessly to the door of the single room and put his ear to the wood. The moans were more pronounced now. Sharp cries of pain, abruptly stilled. A strong hand clasped over a

mouth, fingers pressed into flesh, choking off all but throaty protests. And there were words, spoken harshly in Italian.

'Whore! Pig! It was to be Marseilles! Nine hundred thousand lire! Two or three weeks at most! We sent our people; you were not there. He was not there. No courier of drugs had ever heard of you! Liar! Whore! Where were you? What have you done! Traitor!'

A scream was suddenly formed, more suddenly cut off, the guttural cry that followed searing in its torment. What in the name of God was *happening*? Scofield slammed his hand against the door, shouting as though only half-conscious, incoherent, his words slurred and barely comprehensible.

'Stop it! Stop it! What is this? I can't . . . can't . . . Wait! I'll run downstairs! There are police in the square. I'll bring the police!'

He pounded his feet on the stone floor as if running, his shouts trailing off until there was silence. He pressed his back into the wall and waited, listening to the commotion within. He heard cracks of slapping, gasps of pain as punches were delivered and hysterical cries aborted.

There was a sudden loud thud. A body — her body — was slammed into the door, and then the door was pulled open, Antonia propelled through it with such force she sprawled forward falling to her knees. What Bray saw of her caused him no reaction. There was no emotion, only movement . . . the inevitable: he would inflict punishment.

The man rushed through the door, weapon first. Scofield shot out his right hand, catching the gun, pivoting as he did so, his left foot arcing up viciously into the attacker's groin. The man grimaced in shock and sudden agony; the gun fell to the floor, metal clattering against stone. Bray grabbed the man's throat, smashing his head into the wall, and twisting him by the neck into the open doorframe. He held the Italian upright, and hammered his fist into the man's lower rib cage; he could hear the bone crack. He plunged his knee into the small of the man's back and with both hands acting as a battering ram, sent him plummeting through the door into the double room. The Italian collapsed over the obstructing sofa and fell senseless to the floor beyond it. Scofield turned and ran to Antonia.

Reaction was allowed now; he felt sick. Her face was bruised, spider veins of red had spread from the swellings caused by

The doctor closed the door of the examining room and spoke in English. He had been schooled in London and recruited by British intelligence. Scofield had found him during an operation involving *Cons Op* and MI6. The man was safe. He thought all clandestine services were slightly mad, but since the British had paid for his last two years in medical school, he accepted his part of the bargain. He was simply on-call to treat unbalanced people in a very foolish business. Bray liked him.

'She's sedated and my wife is with her. She'll come out of it in a few minutes and you can go.'

'How is she?'

'In pain, but it won't last. I've treated the burns with an ointment that acts as a local anaesthetic for the skin areas. I've given her a jar.' The doctor lit a cigarette; he had not finished. 'An ice pack or two should be applied to the facial contusions; the swellings will go down overnight. The cuts are minor, no stitches required.'

'Then she's all right,' said Scofield, relieved.

'No, she's not, Bray.' The doctor exhaled smoke. 'Oh, medically she's sound and with a little makeup and dark glasses she'll no doubt be up and about by noon tomorrow. But she is not all right!'

'What do you mean?'

'How well do you know her?'



'I'd like her to be your business if she needs help. If you don't mind.'

The doctor studied him. 'My services are limited to medicine, you know that.'

'I understand. She has no one else, she's not from Rome. Can she come to you . . . if any of those scums get torn away?'

The Italian nodded. 'Tell her to come and see us if she needs medical attention. Or a friend.'

'Thank you very much. And thanks for something else. You've fitted several pieces into a puzzle I couldn't figure out. I'll go in now, if it's all right.'

'Go ahead. Send my wife out here.'

Scotfield touched Antonia's cheek. She lay still on the bed, but at the touch rolled her head to the side, her lips parted, a gasp of protest escaping her throat. Things were clearer now, the puzzle that was Antonia Gravel coming more into focus. For it was the focus that had been lacking, he had not been able to see through the opaque glass wall she had created between herself and the outside world. The commanding woman in the hills who displayed courage without essential strength; yet who could face a man she believed wanted her dead and tell him to fire away. And the childlike woman on the trawler detached by sea, given to sudden moments of infectious laughter. The laughter had confused him. But it was her way of grasping for small periods of relief and normality. The boat was her temporary sanctuary; she would not be hurt while at sea, and so she had made the most of it. An abused child - or a prisoner - allowed an hour of fresh air and sunshine. Take the moments and find joy in them. If only to forget. For those brief moments.

A scarred mind worked that way. Scotfield had seen too many scarred minds not to recognize the syndrome once he understood the scars. The doctor had used the phrase 'a mass of confusion' in her lovely head. What could anyone expect? Antonia Gravel had spent her own eternity in a maze of pain. That she had survived above a vegetable was not only remarkable . . . it was the sign of a professional.

Strange, thought Bray, but that conclusion was the highest compliment he could pay. In a way, it made him sick.

She opened her eyes, blinking in fear, her lips trembling. Then she seemed to recognize him; the fear receded and the trembling

'The courier could not wait, and I was ready for him. We were put into a storage room below deck. The ship was not scheduled to sail for over an hour, so I said to the pig that perhaps we should wait and not risk being intruded upon. But he would not and I knew he would not; if he had I would have provoked him, displaying one breast at a time, groping his soiled trousers if I had to. For each minute was precious to me. I knew I could not go out to sea; once at sea what remained of my life was over. I had made a promise to myself. I would leap into water at night and drown in peace rather than face Marseilles where the horror would begin again. But I did not have to . . .'

Antonia stopped, the pain of the memory choking her. Bray took her hand and held it in his. 'Go on,' he said. She had to say it. It was the final moment she had to somehow face and exorcize; he felt it as surely as if it were his own.

'The pig pulled off my coat and tore the blouse from my chest. It did not matter that I was willing to remove them, he had to show his bull strength; he had to rape, for he was taking – not being given. He ripped the skirt off my waist until I stood naked before him. Like a maniac, he removed his own clothes and placed himself under the light, I suppose so that I might stand in awe of his nakedness.

'He grabbed me by the hair and forced me to my knees . . . to waist . . . and I was sick beyond sickness. But I knew the war was coming, and so I shut my eyes and played my part and thought about the beautiful hills in Porto Vecchio, where my grandmother lived . . . where I would live for the rest of my life.

'It happened. The courier threw himself upon me, grunting like an animal, his sweat pouring over me, his stench filling my nostrils.

'I moved us both closer to the coil of rope, shouting in frenzied whispers the things my rapist wanted to hear, as I inched my hand towards the middle of the coil. My moment had come. I had carried a knife – a plain dinner knife I had sharpened on stone – and had shoved it into the coil of rope. I touched the handle and thought again about the beautiful hills in Porto Vecchio.

'And as that scum lay naked on top of me, I raised the knife behind him and plunged it into his back. He screamed and tried to raise himself, but the wound was too deep. I pulled it out

and brought it down again, and again, and again . . . and, *mother of Christ*, again and again! I could not stop killing!

She had said it, and now she cried uncontrollably, Scofield held her, stroking her hair, saying nothing for there was nothing he could say that would ease the pain. Finally, the terrible control she forced upon herself returned.

'It had to be done. You understand that, don't you?' Bray said.

She nodded, 'Yes.'

'He didn't deserve to live, that's clear to you, isn't it?'

'Yes.'

'That's the first step, Antonia. You've got to accept it. We're not in a court of law where lawyers can argue philosophies. For us, it's cut and dried. It's a war and you kill because if you don't, someone will kill you.'

She breathed deeply, her eyes roaming over his face, her hand still in his. 'You are an odd man. You say the right words, but I have the feeling you don't like saying them.'

I don't. I do not like what I am. I did not choose my life, it fell down upon me. I am in a tunnel deep in the earth and I cannot get out. The right words are a comfort. And most of the time I need them for my sanity.

Bray squeezed her hand. 'What happened after? . . .'

'After I killed the courier?'

'After you killed the animal who raped you - who would have killed you.'

'*Grazie ancora*,' said Antonia. 'I dressed in his clothes, rolled up the trousers, pushing my hair into the cap, and filling out the large jacket with what was left of my blouse and skirt. I made my way up to the deck. The sky was dark, but there was light on the pier. Dock workers who were walking up and down the gangplank carrying boxes like an army of ants. It was simple. I . . .'

. . . first put my foot on the ground.'

'Why? What happened?'

'I wanted to scream. I wanted to shout and laugh and run off the pier yelling to everyone that I was free. *Free!* The rest was very easy. The courier had been given money; it was in his trousers' pocket. It was more than enough to get me to Genoa,

where I bought clothes and a ticket on the plane to Corsica. I was in Bastia by noon the next day.'

'And from there to Porto Vecchio?'

'Yes. Free!'

'Not exactly. God knows the prison was different, but you were still a prisoner. Those hills were your cell.'

Antonia looked away. 'I would have been happy there for the rest of my life. Since I was a child I loved the valley and the mountains.'

'Keep the memories,' said Bray. 'Don't try to go back.'

She turned her head towards him. 'You said one day I could! Those men must pay for what they did! You, yourself, agreed to that!'

'I said I hoped they would. Maybe they will, but let others do the work, not you. Someone would blow your head off if you set foot in those hills.' Scofield released her hand and brushed away the strands of dark hair that had fallen over her cheek when she turned so abruptly to him. Something disturbed him; he was not sure what it was. Something was missing, a quantum jump had been made, a step omitted. 'I know it's not fair to ask you to talk about it, but I'm confused. These drug runs . . . how are they mounted? You say a courier is chosen, a woman assigned to travel with him, both to meet a contact at some given location?'

'Yes. A specific article of clothing is worn by the woman and the contact approaches her first. He pays for an hour of her time and they go off together, the courier following. If anything happens, anything like police interception, the courier claims he is the girl's *mezzano* . . . pimp.'

'So the contact and the courier rendezvous through the woman. Is the narcotics delivery made then?'

'I don't think so. Remember, I never actually made a run, but I believe the contact only sets up the distribution schedules. Where the drugs are to be taken and who is to receive them. After that, he sends the courier to a source, again using the whore as his protection.'

'So if there are any arrests, the . . . whore . . . takes the fall?'

'Yes. Drug authorities do not pay much attention to such women; they're let out quickly.'

'But the source is now known, the schedules in hand and the courier protected . . . ' What was it? Bray stared at the wall, trying

'I'll bet he wasn't. Every negotiation always five times removed from the source . . . A geometric progression, no single line to retrace. That's how they do it.'

'Who?'

'The Matarese.'

Antonia stared at him. 'Why do you say that?'

'Because it's the only explanation. Serious dealers in narcotics wouldn't touch maniacs like the Brigades. It's a controlled situation, a charade mounted to finance terrorism, so the Matarese can continue to finance the guns and the killing. In Italy it's the Red Brigades; in Germany, Baader-Meinhof; in Lebanon, the PLO; in my country, the Minutemen and the Weathermen, the Ku-Klux-Klan and the JDL and all the goddamn fools who blew up banks and laboratories and embassies. Each financed differently, secretly. All pawns for the Matarese - maniacal pawns, and that's the scary thing. The longer they're fed the bigger they grow, and the bigger they grow the more damage they do.' He reached for her hand, aware that he had done so only after they had touched. 'What the hell is it all about?'

'You are convinced, aren't you? That it's happening.'

'Now more than ever. You just showed me how one small part of the whole is manipulated. I knew - or thought I knew - it was *being* manipulated but I didn't know how. Now I do and it doesn't take much imagination to think of variations. It's a guerilla war with a thousand battlegrounds, none of them defined.'

Antonia lifted his hand, as though reassuring herself it was there, freely given; and then her dark brown eyes shifted to his, suddenly questioning. 'You talk as if it were new to you, this war. Surely that's not so. You're an intelligence agent . . .'

'I was,' corrected Bray. 'Not any more.'

'That doesn't change what you know. You said to me only a moment ago that certain things must be accepted, that courts and *avvocati* had no place, that one killed in order not to be killed oneself. Is this war so different now?'

'More than I can explain,' answered Scofield, glancing up at the white wall. 'We were professionals and there were rules - most of them our own, most harsh, but there *were* rules and we abided by them. We knew what we were doing, nothing was pointless. I guess you could say we knew when to stop.' He turned back

purpose. Men bound together by some common cause, whose objective was to paralyse governments and assume control . . . to inherit the earth.

Therein lay the possibility of catastrophe: that same earth could be blown up in the process of inheriting it.

'I'm talking to myself,' agreed Bray, 'because I've changed my mind. I said I wanted you to help me, but you've gone through enough. There are others; I'll find them.'

'I see.' Antonia pressed her elbows into the bed, raising herself. 'Just like that, I'm no longer needed?'

'No.'

'Why was I considered at all?'

Scotfield paused before replying; he wondered how she would accept the truth. 'You were right before: it was one or the other. Enlisting you or killing you.'

Antonia winced. 'But that is no longer true. It's not necessary to kill me?'

'No. It'd be pointless. You won't say anything. You weren't lying. I know what you've lived through. You don't want to go back; you were going to kill yourself rather than land in Marseilles. I believe you would have.'

'Then what's to become of me?'

'I found you in hiding. I'll send you back in hiding. I'll give you money, and in the morning get you papers and a flight out of Rome to some place very far away. I'll write a couple of letters; you'll give them to the people I tell you to. You'll be fine.' Bray stopped for a moment. He could not help himself; he touched her swollen cheek and brushed aside a strand of hair. 'You may even find another valley in a mountain, Antonia. As beautiful as the one you left, but with a difference. You won't be a prisoner there. No one from this life will ever bother you again.'

'Including you, Brandon Scotfield?'

'Yes.'

'Then I think you had better kill me.'

'What?'

'I will *not* leave! You cannot force me to, you cannot send me away because it is convenient . . . or *worse*, because you pity me!' Antonia's dark Corsican eyes glistened again. 'What *right* have you? Where were you when the terrible things were done? To *me*, not to *you*. Don't make such decisions for me! Kill me first!'

'Did you overhear anything?'

'A great deal. The talk was mainly about traitors and how to kill them in brutal ways to make examples of them. The leaders always talked like that. With the Scozzi-Paravicini kidnapping it was very important to them. The traitor had been bribed by the Fascists.'

'What do you mean by "Fascists"?''

'A banker who represented the Scozzis years ago. The Paravicini interests authorized payment.'

'How did he reach him?'

'With a large sum of money there are ways. Nobody really knows.'

Bray got up from the bed. 'I won't ask you how you're feeling, but are you up to getting out of here?'

'Of course,' she replied, wincing as she swung her long legs over the side of the bed. The pain struck her; a sharp intake of breath followed. She remained still for a moment; Scofield held her shoulders.

Again he could not help himself; he touched her face. 'The forty-eight hours are over,' he said softly. 'I'll cable Taleniev in Helsinki.'

'What does that mean?'

'It means you're alive and well and living in Rome. Come on, I'll help you dress.'

She had said that

• I had suggested

There was an expensive restaurant on the Via Frascati owned by the three Crispi brothers, the oldest of whom ran the establishment with the perceptions of an accomplished thief and the eyes of a hungry jackal, both masked by a cherubic face, and a sweeping ebullience. Most who inhabited the velvet lairs of Rome's *dolce vita* adored Crispi, for he was always understanding and discreet, the discretion more valuable than the sympathy. Messages left with him were passed between men and their mistresses, wives and their lovers, the makers and the made. He was a rock in the sea of frivolity, and the frivolous children of all ages loved him.

Scofield used him. Five years ago when NATO's problems had reached into Italy, Bray had put his clamp on Crispi. The restaurateur had been a willing drone.

Crispi was one of the men Bray had wanted to see before Antonia had told him about the Scozzi-Paravicinis; now it was imperative. If anyone in Rome could shed light on an aristocratic family like the Scozzi-Paravicinis, it was the effusive crown prince of foolishness that was Crispi. They would have lunch at the restaurant on the Via Frascati.

An early lunch for Rome, considered Scofield, putting down his coffee and looking at his watch. It was barely noon, the sun outside the window warming the sitting room of the hotel suite, the sounds of traffic floating up from the Via Veneto below. The doctor had called the Excelsior and made the arrangements

only to hear her speak, listen to her voice, as if hearing it would somehow confirm her immediate presence. Yet she did not speak. She stood there, so lovely, so vulnerable, a grown-up child seeking approval, resentful that she felt the need to seek it. The silk dress was tinged with deep red, complimenting her skin, bronzed by the Corsican sun; the large wide hat was angled, framing half her face in white, the other half bordered by her long dark brown hair. The strains of France and Italy had merged in Antonia Gravet; the results were striking.

'You look fine,' said Bray, getting up from the chair.

'Does the make-up cover the marks on my face?'

'I forgot about them so I guess it does.' In the ache he *had* forgotten. 'How are you feeling?'

'I'm not sure. I think the brandy did as much damage as the *Brigatisti*.'

'There's a remedy. A few glasses of wine.'

'I think not, thank you.'

'Whatever you say. I'll get your coat; it's in the closet.' He started across the room, then stopped, seeing her wince. 'You're not all right, are you? It hurts.'

'No, please, really, I'm fine. The salve your doctor friend gave me is very good, very soothing. He's a nice man.'

'I want you to go back and see him any time you need help,' said. 'Whenever anything bothers you.'

You sound as though you won't be with me,' she replied. 'I thought we settled that. I accepted your offer of employment, remember?'

Bray smiled. 'It'd be hard to forget, but we haven't defined the job. We'll be together for a while in Rome, then depending on what we find, I'll be moving on. Your job will be to stay here and relay messages between Taleniekov and me.'

'I am to be a *telegraph* service?' asked Antonia. 'What kind of job is that?'

'A vital one. I'll explain as we go along. Come on, I'll get your coat.' He saw her close her eyes again. Pain had jolted her. 'Antonia, listen to me. When you hurt, don't try to hide it, that doesn't help anybody. How bad is it?'

'Not so bad. It will pass, I know. I've been through this before.'

'Do you want to go back to the doctor?'

'No. But thank you for your concern.'

The care was still there, but Scofield resisted it. 'My only

Crispi's eyes became serious. 'Very well, I have not seen you, Brandon. Then why are you here? Will you be sending people to me?'

'Only Antonia. Whenever she needs help getting cables off to me . . . and to someone else.'

'Why should she need my help to send cables?'

'I want them re-routed, different points of origin. Can you do it?'

'If the idiot *comunisti* do not strike the telephone service again, it is no problem. I call a cousin in Firenze, he sends one; an exporter in Athens or Tunis or Tel Aviv, they do the same. Everybody does what Crispi wants and no one asks a single question. But you know that.'

'What about your own phones? Are they clean?'

The prince of foolishness laughed. 'With what is known to be said on my telephone, there is not an official in Rome who could permit such impertinence.'

Scofield remembered Robert Winthrop in Washington. 'Someone else said that to me not so long ago. He was wrong.'

'No doubt he was,' agreed Crispi, his eyes amused. 'Forgive me, Brandon, but you people deal merely in matters of state. We on the Via Frascati deal in matters of the heart. Ours take precedence where confidentiality is concerned. They always have.'

Bray returned the Italian's smile. 'You know, you may be right.' He lifted the glass of wine to his lips. 'Let me throw a name at you. Scozzi-Paravicini.' He drank.

Crispi nodded reflectively, 'Blood seeks money, and money seeks blood. What else is there to say?'

'Say it plainly.'

'The Scozzis are one of the noblest families in Rome. The venerable contessa to this day is chauffeured in her restored Bugatti up the Veneto, her children pretenders to thrones long since abandoned. Unfortunately, all they had were their pretensions, not a thousand lire between them. The Paravicinis had money, a great deal of money, but not a drop of decent blood in their veins. It was a marriage made in the heavenly courts of mutual convenience.'

'Whose marriage?'

'The contessa's daughter to Signor Bernardo Paravicini. It was a long time ago, the dowry a number of millions and gainful employment for her son, the count. He assumed his father's title.'

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Of course, by then Scofield had. In Bern. And in Paris and London and, naturally, Berlin. He had not told her; his true professional life had never touched her. Until it touched her with finality. Had things been different, he might have given her one of those accounts. After he had transferred out of Consular Operations into a civilized branch of the State Department.

Goddamn it! He was going to! It had only been a matter of weeks!

'You are so far away.'

'What?' Bray brought the glass to his lips; it was a reflex gesture for he had finished the drink. It occurred to him that he was drinking too much.

'You're looking at me, but I don't think you see me.'

'I certainly do. I miss the hat. I liked the white hat.'

She smiled. 'You don't wear a hat inside. The waiter who brought us dinner would have thought me silly.'

'You wore it at Crispi's place. That waiter didn't.'

'A restaurant is different.'

'Both inside.' He got up and walked to the small table where the whisky was next to an ice bucket. He poured himself a drink.

'Thank you again for these.' Antonia glanced at the boxes and shopping bags beside the chair. 'It is like Christmas Eve, I don't know which to open next.' She laughed. 'But there was a Christmas in Corsica like this! *Papa* would scowl for a month at the sight of such things. Yes, I *do* thank you.'

'No need to.' Scofield remained by the table, adding more whisky to his glass. 'They're equipment. Like an office typewriter or an adding machine or file cabinets. They go with the job.'

'I see.' She replaced the skirt and the blouse into the box. 'But you don't,' she said.

'I beg your pardon?'

'*Niente*. Does the whisky help you relax?'

'You could say that. Would you like one?'

'No, thank you. I'm more relaxed than I have been in a very long time. It would be wasted.'

'To each according to his needs. Or wants,' said Scofield, lowering himself into the chair. 'You can go to bed, if you like. Tomorrow's going to be a long day.'

'Does my company bother you?'

'No, of course not.'

'But you prefer to be alone.'

'I hadn't thought about it.'

She used to say that. In West Berlin, when there were problems and I would sit by myself trying to think as others might think. She would be talking and I would not hear her. She used to get angry - not angry, hurt - and say 'You'd rather be alone, wouldn't you?' And I would, but I could not explain. Perhaps if I had explained . . . Perhaps an explanation would have served as a warning

'Is something's troubling you, why not talk about it?'

Oh, God, her words! In West Berlin

'Stop trying to be somebody else!' He heard the statement shouted in his own voice. It was the whisky, the goddamn whisky! 'I'm sorry, I didn't mean that,' he added quickly, putting the glass down 'I'm tired and I've had too much to drink. I didn't mean it.'

'Of course you did,' said Antonia, getting up 'I think I understand now. But you should understand also. I am not somebody else. I have had to pretend to be someone who was not me and that is the surest way to know who you are. I am myself, and you helped me - find that person again.' She turned and walked rapidly into the hall.

and was on college.

There was a knock on the door, the hallway door, Scofield spun around. Instinctively felt the holster strapped to his chest under his jacket. He went to the side of the door and spoke.

'Sì? Chi è?'

'Uno messaggio, Signor Pastore. Da vostro amico, Crispi. Di Via Frascati.'

Bray put his hand inside his jacket, checked the chain on the door and opened it. In the hallway stood the waiter from Crispi's.

'Prego,' replied the waiter, accepting the tip.

Scofield closed the door, and tore open the envelope. Two

gold-embossed tickets were attached to a note. He removed them and read Crispi's message, the handwriting as well as the language florid.

Word has reached Count Scozzi from the undersigned that an American named Pastor will introduce himself at Villa d'Este. The Count understands that this Pastor has extensive connections in the OPEC countries, acting frequently as a purchasing agent for oil-soaked sheiks. These are endeavours such men never discuss, so just smile and learn where the Arabian Gulf is located. The Count understands too that Pastor is merely on holiday and seeks pleasant diversions. All things considered, the Count may offer them.

I kiss the hand of the *bella signorina*.

Ciao,

Crispi

Bray smiled. Crispi was right: no one who performed middleman services for the sheiks ever discussed those services. Profiles were kept excessively low because the stakes were excessively high. One simply did not talk about them - as he would not at Villa d'Este. Instead, he would talk of other things with Count Guillamo Scozzi.

He heard the latch turn on the bedroom door. There was a moment of hesitation before Antonia opened it. When she did, Bray realized why. She stood in the doorframe in a black slip he had bought her downstairs. She had removed her brassiere, her breasts swelling against the sheer silk, her long legs outlined below in opaque darkness. She was barefoot, the bronzed skin of her calves and ankles in perfect concert with her arms and face. Her lovely face, striking yet gentle, with the dark eyes that held his without wavering, without judgement.

'You must have loved her very much,' she said quietly.

'I did. It was a long time ago.'

'Not long enough, apparently. You called me Toni. Was that her name?'

'No.'

'I'm glad. I would not wish to be mistaken for someone else.'

'You made that clear. It won't happen again.'

Antonia was silent, remaining motionless in the doorway, her eyes still without judgement. When she spoke, it was a question. 'Why do you refuse yourself?'

webs of diamonds and strings of pearls fell from elongated throats, and all too often from too many chins. Slender *cavalieri*, dashing in their scarlet cummerbunds and greying temples, co-existed with squat, bold men who had cigars, and more power than their appearances might signify. Music was provided by no less than four orchestras, ranging in size from six to twenty instruments, playing everything from the stately strains of Monteverdi to the frenzied beat of the disco. Villa d'Este belonged to the *belli Romani*.

Of all the beautiful people, one of the most striking was Antonia - Toni. (It was Toni now by dual decree arrived at in the comfort of the bed.) No jewels adorned her neck or wrists; somehow they would have been impediments to the smooth, bronzed skin set off by the simple gown of white and gold. The facial swellings had receded, as the doctor said they would. She wore no sunglasses now, her wide brown eyes reflecting the light. She was as lovely as any part of her surroundings, lovelier than most of her would-be equals, for her beauty was understated, and grew with each second of observation in the beholder's eyes.

For convenience, Toni was introduced quite simply as the rather mysterious Mr Pastor's friend from Lake Como. Certain parts of the lake were known to be retreats for the expensive *Jren* of the Mediterranean. Crispi had done his job well; he provided just enough information to intrigue a number of guests. Those who might wish to learn the most about the quiet Mr Pastor were told the least, while others too engrossed with themselves to care about Pastor were told more, so they could relate what they had learned as gossip, which was their major industry.

Those men whose concerns were more directly - even exclusively - financial, were prone to take his elbow and inquire softly about the projected status of the dollar or the stability of investments in London, San Francisco and Buenos Aires. With such inquisitors, Scofield inclined his head briefly at some suggestions and shook it with a single motion at others. Eyebrows were raised - unobtrusively. Information had been imparted, although Bray had no idea what it was.

After one such encounter with a particularly insistent questioner he took Toni's arm and they walked through a massive

Crispi I'd look you up. We arrived here less than an hour ago and it's been a little hectic. I would have recognized you, naturally, but I'm surprised you knew me.'

Scozzi laughed, displaying teeth so white and so perfectly formed they could not possibly have come with the original machine. 'Crispi is, indeed, delightful, but I'm afraid a bit of a rascal. He was rapturous over *la bella signorina*.' The count inclined his head to Antonia. 'I see her, I find you. As always, Crispi's taste is impeccable.'

'Excuse me.' Scofield touched Toni's forearm. 'Count Scozzi, my friend, Antonia . . . from Lake Como.' The first name and the lake said it all; the count took her hand and raised it to his lips.

'An adorable creature. Rome must see more of you.'

'You're too kind, Excellency,' said Antonia, as if born to attend the *Festa Villa d'Este*.

'Truthfully, Mr Pastor,' continued Scozzi, 'I've been told that many of my more bothersome friends have been annoying you with questions. I apologize for them.'

'No need to. I'm afraid Crispi's descriptions included more mundane matters.' Bray smiled with disarming humility. 'When people learn what I do, they ask questions. I'm used to it.'

'You're very understanding.'

'It's not hard to be. I just wish I were as knowledgeable as so . . . think I am. Usually I simply try to implement decisions taken before I got there.'

'But in those decisions,' said the count, 'there is knowledge, is there not?'

'I hope so. Otherwise an awful lot of money's being thrown away.'

'Blown away with the desert winds, as it were,' clarified Scozzi. 'Why do I think we actually *have* met before, Mr Pastor?'

The sudden question had been considered by Scofield; it was always a possibility and he was prepared for it. 'If we had I think I'd remember; but it might have been the American embassy. Those parties were never as grand as this, but just as crowded.'

'Then you are a fixture on Embassy Row?'

'Hardly a fixture, but sometimes a last-minute guest.' Bray smiled, self-deprecatingly. 'It seems there are times when my countrymen are as interested in asking me questions as your friends here in Tivoli.'

wishing to . . . "talk for a bit", I believe you said.'

Scofield drank the last of his champagne, speaking as he took the glass from his lips. 'Do you think we might go outside for a minute or two? I have a confidential message for you from a client on - let's say, the Arabian Gulf. It's why I'm here tonight.' Scozzi's eyes clouded, 'A message for me? Naturally, as most of Rome and Torino, I've met casually with a number of gentlemen from the area, but none I can recall by name. But, of course, we'll take a stroll. You intrigue me.' The count started forward, but Bray stopped him with a gesture.

'I'd rather we weren't seen going out together. Tell me where you'll be and I'll show up in twenty minutes.'

'How extraordinary! Very well.' The Italian paused. 'Ippolito's Fountain, do you know it?'

'I'll find it.'

'It's quite a distance. There shouldn't be anyone around.'

'That's fine. Twenty minutes.' Scofield nodded. Both turned and walked away, through the crowds, in opposite directions.

There were no floodlights at the fountain, nor sounds of disturbance as a man crawled around the rocks and walked silently through the foliage. Bray was taking no chances that Scozzi had stationed aides in the vicinity. If he had, Scofield would have sent a message to the Italian, naming a second, immediate rendezvous.

They were alone - or would be in a matter of minutes. The count was strolling down the path towards the fountain. Bray doubled back through a weed-filled garden, emerging on the path fifty feet behind Scozzi. He cleared his throat the moment Scozzi reached the waist-high wall of the fountain's pool. The count turned; there was just enough light from the terraces above for each to see the other. Scofield was bothered by the darkness. Scozzi could have chosen any number of places more convenient, less filled with shadows. Bray did not like shadows.

'Was it necessary to come down this far?' he asked. 'I wanted to see you alone, but I hadn't figured on walking half-way back to Rome.'

'Nor had I, Mr Pastor, until you made the statement that you did not care to have us seen leaving together. It brought to my mind the obvious. It is, perhaps, not to my advantage to be seen talking in private with you. You are a broker for the sheiks.'

'You're a count, so I'll bend the rules a bit. Let's say there's a prince living in a sizable country, a sheikdom, really, on the Gulf. His uncle, the king, is from another era; he's old and senile but his word is law, just as it was when he led a Bedouin tribe in the desert. He's squandering millions with bad investments, depleting the sheikdom's resources, taking too much out of the ground too quickly. This hypothetical prince would like him removed. For everyone's good. He appeals to the council through the son of Alberto Scozzi, named for the Corsican *padrone*, Guillaume . . . That's the message. Now I'd like to speak for myself.'

'Who are you?' interrupted the Italian, his eyes now wide. 'Who sent you?'

'Let me finish,' said Bray quickly. He had to get past the initial jolt, jump to a second plateau. 'As an observer of this . . . hypothetical equation, I can tell you it's reached a crisis. There isn't a day to lose. The prince needs an answer and, frankly, if I bring it to him, I'll be a much richer man for it. You, of course, can name the council's price. And I can tell you that . . . fifty million, American, is not out of the question.'

'Fifty million.'

It worked; the second plateau was reached. Even for a man like Guillermo Scozzi, the amount was staggering. His arrogant lips were parted in amazement. It was the moment to complicate, to turn again.

The sum is conditional, of course. It's a maximum figure that requires an immediate answer, eliminating subsequent contacts, and delivery of the package within seven days. It won't be easy. The old man is guarded day and night by *fida'is* - they're a collection of mad dogs who . . . Scofield paused. 'But then, I don't have to tell you about anything related to Hassan ibn al-Sabbāh, do I? From what I gather the Corsican drew on him pretty extensively. At any rate, the prince suggests a programmed suicide . . .'

'Enough!' whispered Scozzi. 'Who are you, Pastor? Is the name intended to mean something to me? Pastor? Priest? Are you a high priest sent to test me?' The Italian's voice rose stridently. 'You talk of things buried in the past. How dare you?'

'I'm talking about fifty million American dollars. And don't tell me - or my client - about things buried. His father was buried with his throat slit from chin to collar bone by a maniac

sent by the council. Check your records, if you keep them; you'll find it. My client wants his own back again and he's willing to pay roughly fifty times what his father's brother paid.' Bray stopped for a moment and shook his head in disapproval and sudden frustration. 'This is crazy! I told him for less than half the amount I could buy him a legitimate revolution, sanctioned by the United Nations. But he wants it *this* way. With you. And I think I know why. He said something to me; I don't know if it's part of his message but I'll deliver it anyway. He said, "The way of the Matarese is the only way. They'll see my faith." He wants to join you.'

Guillermo Scozzi recoiled; his legs were pressed against the wall of the fountain, his arms rigidly at his side, 'What right have you to say these things to me? You are insane, a madman! I don't know what you're talking about.'

'Really? Then we've got the wrong man. We'll find the right one; I'll find him. We were given the words; we know the response.'

'What words?'

'*Perro nostro . . .*' Scofield let his voice trail off, his eyes riveted on Scozzi's lips in the dim light.

Involuntarily, the lips parted. The Italian was about to utter the third word, complete the phrase that had lived for seventy years in the remote halls of Porto Vecchio. Guillermo Scozzi was about to say . . . *circulo*.

He did not. Instead, he whispered again, shock replaced by a concern so deeply felt he could barely be heard. 'My God! You cannot . . . you *must* not! Where have you come from? What have you been told?'

'Just enough to know I've found the right man. One of them, at any rate. Do we deal?'

'Do not presume, Mr Pastor! Or whatever your name is.' There was fury now in the Italian's voice.

'Pastor'll do. All right, I've got my answer. You pass. I'll tell my client.' Bray turned.

'*Fermato!*'

'*Perchè? Che causa?*' Scofield spoke over his shoulder without moving.

'Your Italian is very quick, very fluent.'

'So are several other languages. It helps when you travel a lot. I travel a lot. What do you want?'

'You will stay here until I say you may leave.'

'Really?' said Scofield, turning to face Scozzi again. 'What's the point? I've got my answer.'

'You'll do as I tell you. I have only to raise my voice and an aide will be beside you, blocking any departure you may consider.'

Bray tried to understand. This powerful *consigliere* could deny everything – he had, after all, said nothing – and have a strange American followed. Or he could call for help; or he might simply walk away himself and send armed men to find him. He could do any of these things – he *was* part of the Matarese; the admission was in his eyes – but he chose to do none of them.

Then Scofield thought he did understand. Guillamo Scozzi, the quick-thinking industrial pirate with the Borgia mentality, was not sure what he should do. He was caught in a dilemma that had suddenly overwhelmed him. It had all happened too fast, he was not prepared to make a decision. So he made none.

Which meant that there was someone else – someone nearby, accessible – who *could*.

Someone at Villa d'Este that night.

'Does this mean that you're reconsidering?' asked Bray.

'It means *nothing*!'

Then why should I stay? I don't think you should give orders ; I'm not one of your Praetorians. We don't deal; it's as e as that.'

t is *not* that simple!' Scozzi's voice rose again, fear more pronounced than anger now.

'I say it is, and I say the hell with it,' said Scofield, turning again. It was important that the Italian summon his unseen guard. Very important.

Scozzi did so. '*Veni! Presto!*'

Bray hear racing feet on the dark path; in seconds a broad-shouldered, stocky man in evening clothes came running out of the shadows.

trouser pocket, his Browning strapped to his chest beneath his tuxedo. He walked through the French doors into a crowded room; it was the 'courtyard' devoted anachronistically to the crashing sounds of the disco beat. Revolving mirrored globes of coloured lights hung from the ceiling, spinning crazily as dancers weaved and jolted their bodies, their faces set in rigid expressions, lost in the beat and grass and alcohol.

This was the nearest room to the most direct set of steps from the terrace closest to the path from Ippolito's Fountain. In Scozzi's state of mind it *had* to be the one he entered first; there were two entrances. Which had he taken?

There was a break in the movement on the dance floor, and Bray had his answer. There was a heavy door in the wall behind a long buffet table. Two men were rushing towards it; they had been summoned; an alarm had been raised.

Scofield made his way to the door, excusing himself around the rim of frenzied bodies, and slowly pushed it open, his hand on the Browning under his jacket. Beyond was a narrow winding staircase of thick reddish stone; he could hear footsteps above.

There were other sounds as well. Men were shouting, two voices raised in counterpoint, one stronger, calmer, the other on the verge of hysteria. The latter voice was Count Guillermo Scozzi's.

Bray started up the steps, pressing his back against the wall, Browning held at his side. Around the first curve was a door, but the voices did not come from within it; they were farther up, beyond a second door, diagonally above on a second landing. Scozzi was screaming now. Scofield was close enough to hear the words clearly.

'He spoke of the *Brigades*, and – oh, my God! – of the *shepherd*! Of the *Corsican*! He *knows*! Mother of Christ, he *knows*!'

'*Silence!* He probes, he does not know. We were told he might do so; the old man telephoned about him, and he had certain facts. More than we'd assumed, and that is troublesome, I grant you.'

'*Troublesome?* It's *chaos*! A word, a hint, a breath, and I could be *ruined*! Everywhere!'

'You?' said the stronger voice contemptuously. 'You are nothing, Guillermo! You are only what we tell you you are. Remember that . . . You walked away, of course. You gave

likely reveal an identity to save it. He turned to the wall, his hands on the rim of a chair, a *cavaliere* with too much wine in him.

The heavy door burst open and the first of the two killers raced out, his companion close behind him, but still behind him. The first man headed for the French doors and the steps to the terrace below; the second started around the edge of the dance floor towards the far archway.

Scofield leaped forward, twisting his body in a series of contortions as though he were a lone dancer gone wild with the percussive sounds of the rock music; he was not the only picture of drunkenness; there were more than a few on the crowded dance floor. He reached the second man and threw his arm over a shoulder, clamping his hand on the holster beneath the jacket, immobilizing the weapon inside it by gripping the handle through the cloth, forcing the barrel into the man's chest. The Italian struggled; it was useless and in seconds he knew it. Bray surged his right hand along the edge of the man's waist and dug his fingers into the base of the rib cage, yanking back with such force that the man screamed.

The scream went unnoticed for there were screams everywhere and deafening music and revolving lights that blinded one moment, leaving residues of white the next. Scofield pulled the man back to the row of chairs against the wall and spun him around, forcing him down into the one at the end nearest the heavy door. He plunged his fingers into the Italian's throat, his left hand now under the jacket, his fingers inching towards the trigger, the barrel still jammed into the man's flesh. He put his lips next to the killer's ear.

'The man upstairs! Who *is he*? Tell me, or your own gun will blow your lungs out! The shot won't even be heard in here. Who *is he*?'

'No!' The man tried to arch out of the chair; Bray sunk his knee cap into the rising groin, his fingers choking the windpipe. He pressed both; pain without release or relief.

'I warn you and it's final! *Who is he*?'

Saliva poured out of the man's mouth, his eyes two circles of red webs, his chest heaving in surrender. He abandoned his cause, and he expelled the name in a strained whisper.

'*Paravicini.*'

Bray viced a last clamp on the killer's windpipe; the air to

through the terraces to the right and back inside through the hall to the parking . . .

Screams erupted from inside. Men were shouting, women shrieking, and within seconds figures in various stages of drunkenness surged out of doors, colliding with each other. There was a sudden chaos inside and the panicked words were clear.

Omicidio!

Terrorist!

Fuggine!

The body of Count Guillamo Scozzi had been found.

Bray and Antonia raced down to the first level of terrace, and began running by the wall filled with ornate boxes of plants. At the end of the enclosure there was a narrow opening into the next. Scofield held her hand and pulled her through.

'Fermata! You stay!'

The shout came from above; the first man who had rushed out of the door only minutes before, stood on the stone steps, a weapon in his hand. Bray slammed his shoulder into Antonia, sending her crashing into the wall. He dived to his right on the concrete, rolled to his left, and yanked the Browning from his holster. The man's shots exploded the ancient stone above Scofield; Bray aimed from his back, his shoulders off the pavement, his right hand steadied by his left. He fired twice; the man fell forward, tumbling down the steps.

The gunshots accelerated the chaos; screams of terror filled the elegant terraces of the Villa d'Este as the panicked crowds of revellers raced everywhere. Bray reached Antonia; she was crouching by the wall.

'Are you all right?'

'I'm alive.'

'Come on!'

They found a break in the wall where a trough carried a rushing stream of water to a pool below. They stepped through and ran down the side of the man-made rivulet to the first path, an alleyway, bordered on both sides by what appeared to be hundreds of stone statues spewing arcs of water in unison. The floodlights filtered through the trees; the scene was eerily peaceful, juxtaposed to but not affected by the stampeding chaos from the terraces above.

'Straight through!' said Scofield. *'At the end there's a waterfall and another staircase. It'll get us back up there.'*

work out the procedures and get you a place to stay.'

'Where will you go?'

'London. We know about Paravicini now; he's the Sco factor. London's next.'

'Why there?'

'Paravicini said Turin was to cable "the eagles, the ca With what your grandmother told us in Corsica, that co isn't hard to figure out. One eagle is my country, the oth Talenickov's.'

'It doesn't follow,' disagreed Antonia. 'Russia is the bear.'

'Not in this case. The Russian bear is Bolshevik, the Russi eagle, Czarist. The third guest at Villa Matarese in April ninete eleven was a man named Voroshin. Prince Andrei Vorosh From St Petersburg. That's Leningrad now. Talenickov's his way there.'

'And the "cat"?''

'The British lion. The second guest, Sir John Waverly. descendant, David Waverly, is England's Foreign Secretary.'

'A very high position.'

'Too high, too visible. It doesn't make sense for him to involved, either. Any more than the man in Washington, senator who will probably be President next year. And becau esn't make sense, it scares the hell out of me.' Scofi ed her hand, and reached for the ignition. 'We're getti . Whatever there is to be found under the two eag the cat may be harder to dig out, but it's there. Paravic made that clear. He said the "burials" had to be "absolut He meant that all the connections had to be re-examined, p farther out of reach.'

'You'll be in a great deal of danger.' She touched his a again.

Taleniekov walked to the middle of the block on Helsinki's Itä Kaivopuisto, noting the lights of the American Embassy down the street. The sight of the building was appropriate; he had been thinking of Beowulf Agate off and on for most of the day.

It had taken him most of the day to absorb the news in Scofield's cable. The words themselves were innocuous, a salesman's report to an executive of a home office regarding Italian exports of Finnish crystal, but the new information was startling and complex. Scofield had made extraordinary progress in a very short time.

He had found the first connection; it was a Scozzi - the first name on the guest list of Guillaume de Matarese - and the man was dead, killed by those who controlled him. Therefore, the American's assumption in Corsica that the members of the Matarese council were not born but selected, proved accurate. The Matarese had been taken over, a mixture of descendants and usurpers, it was consistent with the dying words of Aleksie Krupsky in Moscow.

The Matarese was dormant for years. No one could make contact. Then it came back, but it was not the same. Killings . . . without clients, senseless butchery without a pattern . . . governments paralysed.

This was, indeed, a new Matarese and infinitely more deadly than a cult of fanatics dedicated to paid political assassination.

Polish border. He was in his early fifties – the face confirmed that – considered a sound if uninspired professional, someone who did his work quietly, by rote-efficiency, but with little else. Through seniority he has risen in the KGB, but his lack of initiative had delegated him to a post in Vyborg.

The Americans had made a perceptive choice in his recruitment. Here was a man doomed to insignificance by his own insignificance, yet privy to ciphers and schedules because of accumulated rank. A second-in-command at Vyborg knew the end of a rather inglorious road had been reached. Resentments could be played upon; promises of a richer life were powerful inducements. He could always be shot crossing the ice on a final trip to Vainikkala. No one would miss him, a minor success for the Americans, a minor embarrassment to the KGB. But all that was changed now. Pyotr Maletkin was about to become a very important person. He himself would know it the instant Vasili walked up to the window, for if the traitor's face was vaguely familiar to Talenickov, the 'defector's' would be completely known to Maletkin. Every KGB station in the world was after Vasili Vasilievich Talenickov.

Sheltered by the bank of snow he crept back some twenty metres behind the automobile, then walked out on the road. Maletkin was either deep in thought or half asleep; he gave indication that he saw anyone, no turn of the head, no pushing out of the cigarette. It was not until Vasili was within ten feet of the window that the traitor jerked his shoulders around, his face turned to the glass. Talenickov angled his head away as if checking the road behind him as he walked; he did not want his face seen until the window was rolled down: it would interfere with what he had in mind. He stood directly by the door, his head hidden above the roof.

He heard the cranking of the handle, felt the brief swell of heat from inside the car. As he expected, the beam of a flashlight shot out from the seat; he bent over and showed his face, the Graz-Burya shoved through the open window.

'Good morning, Comrade Maletkin. It is Maletkin, isn't it?'

'My God! You!'

With his left hand, Talenickov reached in and held the flashlight, turning it slowly away, no urgency in the act. 'Don't upset yourself,' he said. 'We have something in common now,

'This is *crazy*,' said Maletkin. 'We are dead men.'
'Not for a while. We have business in Leningrad.'

It was noon when they drove over the Kirov Bridge, past the summer gardens wrapped in burlap, and south to the enormous boulevard that was the Nevsky Prospekt. Talenickov fell silent as he looked out the window at the monuments of grandeur that were Leningrad. The blood of millions had been sacrificed to turn the freezing mud and marshland of the Neva River into Peter's window-on-Europe.

They reached the end of the Prospekt under the gleaming spire of the Admiralty Building and turned into the Quay. There along the banks of the river stood the Winter Palace; its effect on Vasili was the same as it had always been. It made him think about the Russia that once had been and ended here when the cruiser *Aurora* steamed up the Neva and fired its cannons into the seat of the false provisional government of Kerensky, signifying the emergence of the new Soviet. The True Russia.

There was no time for such reflections, nor was this the Leningrad he would roam for the next several days – although, ironically, it was *this* Leningrad, *that* Russia, that brought him here. Prince Andrei Voroshin had been part of both.

'Drive over the Anichkov Bridge and turn left,' he said, and into the old housing development district. 'I'll tell you when to stop.'

'What's down there?' asked Maletkin, his apprehension growing with each block, each bridge they crossed, as they travelled into the heart of the city.

'I'm surprised you don't know; you should. A string of illegal boarding houses, and equally illegal cheap hotels that seem to have a collectively revisionist attitude regarding official papers.'

'In *Leningrad*?'

'You *don't* know, do you?' said Talenickov. 'And no one ever told you. You *were* overlooked, comrade. When I was stationed in Riga, those of us who were area leaders frequently came up here and used the district for conferences we wished to keep secret, the ones that concerned our own people throughout the sector. It's where I first heard your name, I believe.'

'*Me? I was brought-up?*'

You can race away to KGB headquarters – it's on the Ligovsky Prospekt, incidentally – and turn me in; that will lead to a chain of revelations which will result in your execution. Or you can wait for me, do as I ask you to do, and you will have bought yourself the identity of someone who can bring you present and future rewards. You'll have your hook in a very important man.'

'Then I don't really have a choice, do I?' said Maletkin. 'I'll be here.' The traitor grinned; he perspired on his chin and his teeth were yellow.

Taleniekov approached the stone steps of the building; it was a three-storey structure with twenty to thirty flats, many crowded, but not hers. Lodzia Kronescha had her own apartment; that decision had been made by the KGB five years ago.

With the exception of a brief weekend conference fourteen months ago in Moscow, he had not seen her since Riga. During the conference they had spent one night together – the first night – but had decided not to meet subsequently, for professional reasons. The 'brilliant Taleniekov' had been showing signs of strain, his oddly intemperate behaviour annoying to many people – and too many people had been talking about it, whispering about it. Him. It was best they sever all associations outside the conference rooms. For in spite of total clearance, was still being watched. He was not the sort of man she'd be seen with; he had told her that, insisted upon it.

Five years ago Lodzia Kronescha had been in trouble; some said it was serious enough to remove her from her post in Leningrad. Others disagreed, claiming her lapses of judgement were due to a temporary siege of depression brought on by family problems. Besides, she was extremely effective in her work; whom would they get to replace her during those times of crisis? Lodzia was a highly qualified mathematician, a doctoral graduate from Moscow University, and trained in the Lenin Institute. She was among the most knowledgeable computer programmers in the field.

So she was kept on and given the proper warnings regarding her responsibility to the state – which had made her education possible. She was relegated to night operations, Computer Division, KGB-Leningrad, Ligovsky Prospekt. That was five years ago; she would remain there for at least another two.

Lodzia's 'crimes' might have been dismissed as professional

'Also it's freezing outside, hardly the season for a summer dress.

'I knew you'd notice that. Most men don't, but you would.'

He held her shoulders, speaking rapidly. 'I've brought you terrible trouble. I'm sorry. I'll leave immediately. Tear your clothes, say you tried to stop me. I'll break into a flat upstairs and . . .'

'Vasili, *listen* to me! That man's not one of us. He's no KGB.'

Taleniekov turned towards the man on the floor. He was regaining consciousness slowly, trying to rise and orient himself at the same time. 'Are you sure?'

'Very. To begin with he's an Englishman, his Russian shout with it. When he mentioned your name I pretended to be shocked angry that our people would think me capable of harbouring a fugitive . . . I said I wanted to telephone my superior. He refused to let me. He said, "We have all we want from you." Those were his exact words.'

Vasili looked at her. 'Would you have called your superior?'

'I'm not sure,' replied Lodzia, her hazel-green eyes steady on his. 'I suppose it would have depended on what he said. It's very difficult for me to believe you're what they say you are.'

'I'm not. On the other hand, you must protect yourself.'

'I was hoping it wouldn't come to that.'

'Thank you . . . old friend.' Taleniekov turned back to the man on the floor and started towards him.

He saw it. He was too late!

Vasili lunged, diving at the figure by the chair, his hands ripping at the man's mouth, pulling it apart, his knee hammering the stomach, jamming it up into the rib cage, trying to induce vomit.

The acrid odour of almonds. Potassium cyanide. A massive dose. Oblivion in seconds, death in minutes.

The cold blue English eyes beneath him were wide and clear with satisfaction. The Matarese had escaped.

of – and left me free with them. I spent weeks, months poring over them, trying to understand. It was there that the . . . “great Taleniekov” . . . learned the most valuable lesson of all: How to see things as the enemy sees them, how to be able to *think* like him. That is the keystone of every success I’ve ever had. My old friend made it possible.’

‘And you must reach him now?’

‘Yes. He’s lived all his life here in Leningrad. When he was born it was St Petersburg; when a young man, Petrograd. He’s seen it all happen and he’s survived. If anyone can help me, he can.’

‘What are you looking for? I think I have a right to know.’

‘Of course you do, but it’s a name you must forget. At least, never mention it. I need information about a family named Voroshin.’

‘A family? From Leningrad?’

‘Yes.’

Lodzia shook her head in exasperation. ‘Sometimes I think the great Taleniekov is a great fool! I can run the name through our computers!’

‘The minute you did, you’d be marked – for all purposes, dead. That man on the floor has accomplices everywhere.’ He turned and walked back to the body, kneeling down to continue his examination of the corpse. ‘Besides, you’d find nothing; it’s many years ago, too many changes of régimes and emphases. Any entry, or entries, had ever been made, I doubt they’d be there now. The irony is that if there was something in the data banks, it would probably mean the Voroshin family is no longer involved.’

‘Involved with *what*, Vasili?’

He did not answer immediately, for he had turned the nude body over and saw it. A small discoloration of the skin on the lower mid-section of the chest, around the area of the heart, barely seen through the matted hair. It was tiny, no more than half an inch in diameter – and it *was* a diameter, for the bluish-purple mark was a circle. At first glance it appeared to be a birthmark, a perfectly natural phenomenon, in no way superimposed on the flesh. But it was not natural; it was placed there by a very experienced needle. Old Krupsky had said the words as he lay dying: *A man was caught, a blemish on his chest, a soldier of the Matarese.*

who had testified for the old gentleman in 1954 – wanted to meet with him privately. That student, this friend, could not be seen in public; he was in trouble and needed help.

There was to be no doubt as to the identity of that student, nor of the danger in which he found himself. The old man had to be jolted, frightened, concern for a once-dear young friend brought to the surface. He had to communicate his alarm to any who might be watching him closely – the arrangements for the meeting just complicated enough to confuse an old man's mind. For in the scholar's confusion and fear would be found tentative movements, bewildered starts and stops, first in one direction, then in another, sudden turns and abrupt reversals, decisions made and instantly rejected. In these circumstances, whoever followed the old man would be revealed; for whatever moves the scholar made, the one following would have to make. They would not be natural.

Lodzia would instruct the old man to leave the enormous library complex by the south-west exit at ten minutes to six that evening; the streets would be dark and no snow was expected. He would be told to walk a number of blocks one way then another. If no contact was made, he was to return to the library, and wait; if it were at all possible, his friend from long ago would try to get there. However, there were no guarantees.

Placed in this situation of stress, the numbers alone would to confuse the scholar, for Lodzia was to abruptly terminate a telephone call without repeating them. Vasili would take care of the rest, a traitor named Maletkin serving as an unwitting accomplice.

'What will you do after you see the old man?' asked Lodzia.

'That depends on what he tells me, or what I can learn from the man who follows him.'

'Where will you stay? Will I see you?'

Vasili stood up. 'It could be dangerous for you if I come back here.'

'I'm willing to risk that.'

'I'm not willing to let you. Besides, you work until morning.'

'I can go in early and get off at midnight. Things are much more relaxed than when you were last in Leningrad. We trade hours frequently, and I am completely rehabilitated.'

'Someone will ask you why.'

An old man bundled up in an overcoat and a black fur hat walked out of the entrance, vapour from his breath meeting the cold air. He stood for a moment on the steps, looking around as if trying to decide which archway to take into the street. His short beard was white, what could be seen of his face was filled with wrinkles and tired, pale flesh. He started down the marble stairs cautiously, holding onto the railing. He reached the concrete courtyard and walked towards the nearest arch on his right.

Talenikov studied the stream of people that came out through the glass doors after the old curator. They seemed to be in groups of twos and threes; he looked for a single man whose eyes strayed to the courtyard below. None did and Vasili was disturbed. Had he been wrong? It did not seem likely, yet there was no single man Talenikov could pick out of the crowds whose focus was on Mikovsky, now half-way across the courtyard. When the scholar reached the street, there was no point in waiting any longer; he *had* been wrong. The Matarese had not found his friend.

A woman. He was *not* wrong: It was a *woman*. A lone woman broke away from the crowd and hurried down the steps, her eyes on the old man. How plausible, thought Vasili. A single woman remaining for hours alone in a library would draw far less attention than a man. Among its élite soldiers, the Matarese women.

He was not sure why it surprised him – some of the best *gen* in the Soviet KGB and the American Consular Operations were women, but their duties rarely included violence. *That's* what startled him now. The woman following old Mikovsky was trailing the curator only to find *him*. Violence was intrinsic to that assignment.

'That woman,' he said to Maletkin. 'The one in the brown overcoat and the visored cap. She's the informer. We've got to stop her from making contact.'

'A *woman*?'

'She is capable of a variety of things which you are not, comrade. Come along now, we must be careful. She won't approach him right away; she'll wait for the most opportune moment and so must we. We've got to separate her, take her when she's far enough away from him so he can't identify her if there's any noise.'

left breast was massive, tissue and intestines clogging the opening. He probed the flesh around the wound; the light was too dim. He took out his cigarette lighter.

He snapped it, stretching the bloody skin beneath the breast holding the light inches above it; the flame danced in the wind.

'For God's sake, *hurry!*' Maletkin stood several feet away, his voice a panicked whisper. 'What are you doing?'

Taleniekov did not reply. Instead, he moved his fingers around the flesh, wiping away the blood to see more clearly.

He found it. In the crease beneath the left breast, angle towards the centre of the chest. A jagged circle of blue surrounded by white skin streaked with red. A blemish that was no blemish at all, but the mark of an incredible army.

The Matarese circle.

'Why would you? There were hundreds here in Leningrad alone. Why the Voroshins?'

'They were not easily forgotten for many reasons. It was not often that the czars of Russia called their own kind thieves and pirates and sought to destroy them. The Voroshin family was notorious. The prince's father and grandfather dealt in the Chinese and African slave trades, from the Indian Ocean to the American South; they manipulated the Imperial banks, forcing merchant fleets and companies into bankruptcies and absorbing them. It is said that when Nicholas secretly ordered Prince Andrei Voroshin from the palace court, he proclaimed: "Should our Russia fall prey to maniacs, it will be because of men like you. You drive them to our throats." That was a number of years before the revolution.'

'You say "secretly ordered" him. Why secretly?'

'It was not a time to expose dissent among the aristocrats. Their enemies would have used it to justify the cries of national crisis. The revolution was in foment decades before the event. Nicholas understood; he knew it was happening.'

'Did Voroshin have sons?'

'I don't know, but I would presume so - one way or the other. He had many mistresses.'

'What about the family itself?'

'Again I have no specific knowledge, but I assume they

As you're aware the tribunals were usually lenient women and children were concerned. Thousands were allowed to flee; only the most frantic wanted that blood on their hands. But I don't believe the Voroshins were allowed to. Actually, I'm quite sure of it, but I don't know specifically.'

'I need specific knowledge.'

'I understand that, and in my judgement you have it. At least enough to refute any theory involving Voroshin and this incredible Matarese society.'

'Why do you say that?'

'Because had the prince escaped, it would not have been to his advantage to keep silent. The Whites in exile were organizing everywhere. Those with legitimate titles were welcomed with open arms and excessive remuneration by the great companies and the international banks; it was good business. It was not in Voroshin's nature to reject such largesse and notoriety. No, Vasili. He was killed.'

Talenickov leaned over, scanning the words. The entry detailed the deaths of Prince Andrei Voroshin, his wife, two sons and their wives, and one daughter, on the afternoon of 21 October 1917, at his estate in Tsarskoye Selo on the banks of the Slovyanka River. It described in bloody particulars the final minutes of fighting, the Voroshins trapped in the great house with their servants, repelling the attacking mob, firing weapons from the windows, hurling cans of flaming petrol from the sloping roofs - at the end, releasing their servants and, in a pact of death using their own gunpowder to blow up themselves and the great house in a final conflagration. Nothing was left but the burning skeleton of a czarist estate, the remains of the Voroshins consumed in the flames.

Images came back to Vasili, memories from the hills at night high above Porto Vecchio. The ruins of Villa Matarese. There too, was a final conflagration.

'I must disagree,' he said softly to Mikovsky. 'This was no execution at all.'

'The tribunals' courts may have been absent,' countered the scholar, 'but I daresay the results were the same.'

'There were no results, no evidence, no proof of death. There were only charred ruins. This entry is false.'

'Vasili Vasilievich! These are the *archives*, every document was read and approved to by the academicians! At the *time*.'

'One was bought. I grant you a great estate was burned to the ground, but that is the limit of existing proof.' Talenickov turned several pages back. 'Look. This report is very descriptive. Figures with guns at windows, men on roofs, servants streaming out, explosions starting in the kitchens, everything seemingly accounted for.'

'Agreed,' said Mikovsky, impressed with the minute details he had read.

'Wrong. There's something missing. In every entry of this nature that we've seen - the storming of palaces and estates, the stopping of trains, the demonstrations - there are always such phrases as "the advance column was led by Comrade So-and-So, the retreat under fire from the czarist guards commanded by provisional Captain Such-and-Such, the execution carried out under the authority of Comrade Blank. As you said before, these entries are all bulging with identities, everything recorded for future confirmation. Well, read this again.'

'That young man of yours was quite impossible,' said Mikhovsky into the telephone, words and tone harshly critical of the night duty officer at the Ministry of Cultural Affairs. 'I made it quite clear - as I assume you made it clear - that he was to remain in the archives until the material was returned. Now, what do I find? The man gone and the key shoved under my door! Really, it's most irregular. I suggest you send someone over to pick it up.'

The old scholar hung up quickly, terminating any chance for the duty officer to speak further. He glanced up at Taleniev, his eyes filled with relief, but looking for approval.

'That performance would have merited you a certificate from Stanislavsky,' Vasili smiled, as he continued to wipe his hands with paper towels, taken from the nearby washroom. 'We're covered - you're covered. Just remember, a body without papers will be found behind the furnaces. If you're questioned, you know nothing, you've never seen him before, your only reaction is one of shock and astonishment.'

'But Cultural Affairs, surely *they*'ll know him!'

'Surely they won't. He wasn't the man sent over with the key. The ministry will have its own problem, quite a serious one. It will have the key back in its possession, but it will have lost a messenger. If that phone is still tapped, the one listening will assume his man was successful. We've bought time.'

'For what?'

'In these times?' asked Vasili. 'These *are* the times. The larger house, the fattened bank account, or the use of a *dacha* for a longer period of time, supplied more luxuriously than one's comrades; a greater fleet of aircraft or a more powerful battleship; the ear of a superior or an invitation to an event others cannot attend. These are very much the times, Yanov. The world you and I live in – personally, professionally, even vicariously – is a global society bursting with greed, nine out of ten inhabitants a Faust. I think it was something Karl Marx never understood.'

'A deliberate transitional omission, my friend. He understood fully; there were other issues to be attacked first.'

Taleniekov smiled. 'That sounds dangerously like an apology.'

'Would you prefer words to the effect that the governing of a nation is too important to be left to the people?'

'A monarchist statement. Hardly applicable. It could have been made by the Czar.'

'But it wasn't. It was made by America's Thomas Jefferson. Again, exercising a transitional omission. Both countries, you see, had just gone through their revolutions; each was a new, emerging nation. Words and decisions had to be practical.'

'Your erudition does not change my judgement. I've seen too much used too much.'

don't want to change anything, least of all your talents of It would like only for you to keep things in perspective, my old pupil. Perhaps we're all in a state of transition.'

'To what?'

Mikovsky lifted his spectacles off the desk and put them on carefully. 'To heaven or hell, Vasili. I haven't the vaguest idea which. My only consolation is that I will not be here to find out. How will you get to Essen?'

'Back through Helsinki.'

'Will it be difficult?'

'No. There is a man from Vyborg who'll help.'

'When will you leave?'

'In the morning.'

'You're welcome to stay the night with me.'

'No, it could be dangerous for you.'

The scholar raised his head in surprise. 'But I thought you said that my performance on the phone removed such concerns.'

'I believe it. I don't think anything will be said for days. Eventually, of course, the police will be called; but by then the

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incident - as far as you're concerned - has faded into an unpleasant lapse in procedures.'

'I understand that, so where is the immediate problem?'

'That I'm wrong. In which case I will have killed us both.'

Mikovsky smiled. 'There's a certain finality in that.'

'I had to do what I did. There was no one else. I'm sorry.'

'Don't be, my old pupil. And you are older, you know. In some ways older than me.' The scholar rose from his chair and walked unsteadily around the desk. 'You must go then, and I will not see you again. Embrace me, Vasili Vasilievich. Heaven or hell, which will it be? I think you know. It is the latter and you have reached it.'

'I got there a long time ago,' said Taleniev, holding the gentle old man he would never see again.

'Colonel Maletkin?' asked Vasili, knowing that the hesitant voice on the other end of the line belonged indeed to the traitor from Vyborg.

'Where are you?'

'At a telephone in the street, not far away. Do you have something for me?'

'Yes.'

'Good. And I have something for you.'

'Also good,' Maletkin said. 'When?'

'Now. Walk out the front entrance of the hotel and turn right. Keep walking, I'll catch up with you.'

'Thank you.'

'Here's a woman here.'

'Tell her to wait. Order her, Colonel. You're an officer of KGB.'

Seven minutes later Maletkin emerged ferret-like on the pavement in front of the entrance, looking smaller than life and glancing in several directions at once without seemingly turning his head. Although it was cold and dark, Vasili could almost see the sweat on the traitor's chin; in a day or so there would be no chin. It would be blown off in a courtyard in Vyborg.

Maletkin began walking north. There were not many pedestrians on Brodsky Street, a few couples linked arm in arm, the inevitable trio of young soldiers looking for warmth some

where, anywhere, before returning to the sterility of their barracks.

Talenickov waited, watched the scene in the street, looking for someone who did not belong.

There was no one. The traitor had not considered double-cross nor had any soldier of the Matusevich picked him up. Vasili left the shadows of the doorway and hastened up the block; in sixty seconds he was directly across from Maletkin. He began whistling *Yankee Doodle Dandy*.

'There's your cable!' said the traitor, spitting out the words in the darkness of a recessed shopfront. 'This is the only duplicate. Now tell me. Who is the informer in Vyborg?'

'The *other* informer, don't you mean?' Talenickov spoke as he snapped his cigarette lighter and looked at the copy of the coded message to Helsinki. It was accurate. 'You'll have the name in a matter of hours.'

'I want it *now*! For all I know someone's already checked with Vyborg. I want my protection; you guaranteed it! I'm leaving here first thing in the morning.'

'*We're* leaving,' interrupted Vasili. 'Before morning, actually.'

'No!'
'Yes. It's a two-hour drive; you'll make that briefing after all.'
'I don't want anything more to *do* with you. Your photograph's on every KGB bulletin board; there were *two* of them down at the Ligovsky headquarters! I found myself perspiring.'

'I wouldn't have thought it! But, you see, you must drive me back to the lake and put me in contact with the Finns. My business here in Leningrad is finished.'

'Why *me*? I've done enough!'

'Because if you don't, I will not be able to remember a name you should know in Vyborg.' Talenickov patted the traitor's cheek; Maletkin flinched. 'Go back to your woman, comrade, and perform well. But finish with her before too long. I want you checked out of the hotel by three-thirty.'

'Three-thirty?'

'Yes. Drive your car to the Anichkov Bridge; be there no later than four o'clock. Make two trips over the bridge and back. I'll meet you on one side or the other.'

'The *militislanyeri*. They stop suspicious vehicles, and a car travelling back and forth over the Anichkov at four in the morning is not a normal sight.'

'Exactly. If there are *militsianyeri* around, I want to know it.'

'Suppose they stop me?'

'Must I keep reminding you that you are a colonel of the KGB? You're on official business. Very official and very secret.' Vasili started to leave, then turned back. 'It just struck me,' he said. 'It may have occurred to you to borrow a weapon and shoot me down at an opportune moment. On the one hand, you could

As long as you were willing to forego the name of the man in Vyborg, such a strategy would appear to be sound. Very little risk, rewards from both camps. But you should know that every step I take in your presence here in Leningrad is being watched by another now.'

Maletkin's immobile head did not prevent his eyes from sweeping about in an 180-degree arc. He spoke with mounting intensity. 'I swear to you such a thing never occurred to me!'

You really are a damn fool, thought Talenjekov. 'Four o'clock then, comrade.'

The row of old buildings in the *dom-vashen* was a decaying black wall of stone mottled by an irregular pattern of dim lights in the windows. The night sounds were a muted cacophony that belonged to the district: voices raised in abrasive arguments alongside laughter that too often

Vasili approached the block from

... seemed a never-ending conveyor belt in the cause of some new economic plan no one understood. He opened the glass door and went inside the small vestibule.

Instantly, he straightened up, the brief performance over; there was no hesitation now. He opened the inner door, walked to the basement staircase, and descended into the dark, filthy environs of the connecting cellars. He passed the door behind which he had placed the dead Englishman, vodka poured down the throat, wrists slashed with a razor. He pulled out his lighter, ignited it and pushed the door back.

The Englishman was gone. Not only was he gone but there

who nodded, indicating another try. The young man knocked again, now louder, more insistent, and again there was only silence from inside.

'Perhaps she's still waiting for you at the Kirov,' said the girl.

'Then again,' added the young man, smiling, 'perhaps she found your old army comrade and they're both avoiding you.'

Taleniekov tried to smile back but could not. He knew only too well what he might find behind the door. 'I'll wait here,' he said. 'Thank you very much.'

The husband seemed to realize he had been facetious at the wrong moment. 'I'm sorry,' he mumbled, taking his wife's arm.

'Good luck,' said the girl, awkwardly. They both walked rapidly up the staircase.

Vasili waited until he heard the sound of a door closing two storeys above. He took his automatic from his pocket and reached for the knob in front of him, afraid to find out that it was not locked.

It was not and his fear mounted. He pushed the door open, stepped inside and closed it. What he saw sent a pain through his chest; he knew a greater pain would follow shortly. The room was a shambles, chairs, tables and lamps overturned; books and cushions were strewn on the floor, articles of clothing lying in scattered disarray. The scene was created to depict a violent struggle, but it was false, overdone, as such constructed scenes were usually overdone. There had been no struggle, but there had been something else. There had been an interrogation based in torture.

The bedroom door was open; he walked towards it, knowing the greater pain would come in seconds, sharp bolts of anguish. He went inside and looked at her. She was on the bed, her clothes torn from her body, the positioning of her legs indicating rape, the act, if it was done, done only for the purposes of an autopsy, undoubtedly performed after she had died. Her face was battered, lips and eyes swollen, teeth broken. Streaks of blood had flowed down her cheeks leaving abstract patterns of deep red on her light skin.

$$T = 1 - \frac{1}{2} \left(\frac{1}{2} \right)^n$$

And then he was touched, so deeply that his eyes filled suddenly

with tears and he could not breathe. Lodzia Kronescha had not broken; she had not revealed to the animal who had operated on her that her lover from the days of Riga was due after midnight. She had done more than keep the secret, far more. She had sent the animal off in another direction. What she must have gone through!

He had not loved in more than half a lifetime; he loved now and it was too late.

Too late? Oh, God!

... where is the problem?

... that I'm wrong. In which case I will have killed us both.

Yanov Mikovsky.

If a follow-up soldier had been sent by the Matarese to Lodzia Kronescha, another surely would have been sent to seek out the scholar.

Vasili raced into the sitting room, to the telephone that had carefully not been disturbed. It did not matter whether or not the line was tapped; he would learn what he had to learn in seconds, be away seconds later before anyone intercepting him could send men to the *dom-vashen*.

He dialled Mikovsky's number. The phone was picked up immediately ... too quickly for an old man.

'Yes?' The voice was muffled, unclear.

'Dr Mikovsky, please.'

'Yes?' repeated the male voice. It was not the scholar's.

'I'm an associate of Comrade Mikovsky and it's urgent that I speak with him. I know he wasn't feeling well earlier; does he need medical attention? We'll send it right away, of course.'

'No.' The man spoke too swiftly. 'Who is calling, please?'

Talenickov forced a casual laugh. 'It's only his office neighbour, Comrade Rydukov. Tell him I've found the book he was looking for ... no, let me tell him myself.'

Silence.

'Yes?' It was Mikovsky; they had let him get on the line.

'Are you all right? Are those men friends?'

'Run, Vasili! Get away! They are ...'

A deafening explosion burst over the line. Talenickov held the telephone in his hand, staring at it. He stood for a moment, allowing sharp bolts of pain to sear through his chest. He loved two people in Leningrad and he had killed them both.

No, that was not true. The Matarese had killed them. And

as his body and his faculties would permit, then make his arrangements. To Essen.

But there was a final arrangement to be made now, before he left his beloved Russia, *for* his Russia.

'In less than a minute we'll reach the rendezvous at the lake,' Maletkin said. 'You'll be met by a Finn along the path to the water's edge. Everything's arranged. Now, *comrade*, I've carried out my end of the bargain, you deliver yours. Who is the other informer at Vyborg?'

'You don't need his name. You just need his rank. He's the only man in your sector who can give you orders, your sole superior. First in command at Vyborg.'

'What? He's a tyrant, a fanatic!'

'What better cover? Drop in to see him . . . privately. You'll know what to say.'

'Yes,' agreed Maletkin, his eyes on fire, slowing the car down as they approached a break in the snowbank. 'Yes, I think I will know what to say . . . Here's the path.'

'And here is your gun,' said Taleniekov, handing the traitor his weapon, minus its firing pin.

'Oh? Yes, thank you,' replied Maletkin, not listening, his thoughts on power unimagined only seconds ago.

Vasili got out of the car. 'Good bye,' he said, closing the door.

As he rounded the back of the automobile towards the path, he heard the sound of Maletkin's window being rolled down.

'It's *incredible*,' said the traitor, sheer gratitude in his voice. 'Thank you.'

'You're welcome.'

The window was rolled up. The roar of the engine joined the screaming whine of the tyres as they spun on the snow. The car sped forward; Maletkin would waste no time getting back to Vyborg.

To his execution.

Taleniekov entered the path that would take him to an escort, to Helsinki, to Essen. He began whistling softly: the tune was *Yankee Doodle Dandy*.

The gentle-looking man in the rumpled clothes and the high-necked cotton sweater clamped a violin case between his knees and thanked the Finnair stewardess for the container of tea. If anyone on board was inclined to guess the musician's age, he'd probably say somewhere between fifty-five and sixty, possibly a little older. Those sitting farther away would start at sixty-plus and add that he was probably older than that.

Yet with the exception of streaks of white brushed into his hair he had used no cosmetics. Taleniekov had learned years ago that the muscles of the face and body conveyed age and infirmity far better than powders and liquid plastics.

The trick was to set the muscles in the desired position of abnormal stress, then go about one's business as normally as possible, *overcoming the discomfort by fighting it, as older people fight the strain of age and cripples do the best they can with their deformities.*

Essen. He had been to the 'black jewel of the Ruhr' twice, neither trip recorded for they were sensitive assignments involving industrial espionage — operations Moscow did not care to have noted anywhere. Therefore, the Matarese had no information that could help it in Essen. No contacts to keep under surveillance, no friends to seek out and trap, nothing. No Yanov Mikovsky, no . . . Lodzia Kronesch.

Essen. Where could he begin? The scholar had been right: he was looking for a sixty-year-old ghost, a hidden absorption of

one man and his family into a vast industrial complex during a period of world chaos. Legal documents going back more than half a century would be out of reach – if they had ever existed in the first place. And even if they had, and were available, they would be so obscured that it could take weeks to trace money and identities – in the tracing his own exposure guaranteed.

Too, the court records in Essen had to be among the most gargantuan and complicated anywhere. The practice of law in Essen the most lucrative of all professions. Where was the man who could make his way through such a maze? Where was the time to do it?

There was a man, a patent attorney, who would no doubt throw up his hands at the thought of trying to find the name of a single Russian entering Essen fifty years ago. But he was a lawyer; he was a place to start. If he was alive, and if he was willing to talk with a long-ago embarrassment, Vasili had not thought of the man in years. Heinrich Kassel had been a thirty-five-year-old junior partner in a firm that did legal work for many of Essen's prominent companies. The KGB dossier on him had depicted a man often at odds with his superiors, a man who championed extremely liberal causes – some so objectionable to his employers they had threatened to fire him. But he was too good; no superior cared to be responsible for his dismissal.

The conspiratorial asses in Moscow had decreed in their wisdom that Kassel was prime material for patent design espionage. In their better wisdom, the asses had sent their most persuasive negotiator, one Vasili Talenickov, to enlist the attorney for a better world.

It took Vasili less than an hour over a trumped-up dinner to realize how absurd the assignment was. The realization came when Heinrich Kassel leaned back in his chair and exclaimed.

'Are you out of your *mind*? I do what I do to keep you bastards out!'

There had been nothing for it. The persuasive negotiator and the misguided attorney had got drunk, ending the evening at dawn, watching the sun come up over the gardens in Gruga Park. They had made a drunken pact: the lawyer would not report Moscow's attempt to the Bonn government – in so far as Moscow had conceived of it so badly – if Talenickov would guarantee that the KGB dossier was substantially altered – in so far as

such erroneous evaluations would do the attorney no good where a full partnership was concerned if they ever leaked out. The lawyer had kept silent, and Vasili had returned to Moscow, amending the German's file with the judgement that the 'radical' attorney was probably a *prococateur* in the pay of the Americans. Kassel might help him, at least tell him where he could start.

If he was able to reach Heinrich Kassel. So many things might have happened to prevent it. Disease, death, relocation, accidents of living and livelihood; it had been twelve years since the abortive assignment in Essen.

There was something else he had to do in Essen, he mused. He had no gun; he would have to purchase one. The West German airport security was such these days that he could not chance the dismantling of his Graz-Burya and packing it in his carry-on travel bag.

There was so much to do, so little time. But a pattern was coming into focus. It was obscure, elusive, contradictory . . . but it was there. The Corsican fever was spreading, the infectors using massive sums of money and ingenious financing methods to create pockets of chaos everywhere, recruiting an army of élite soldiers who would give up their lives instantly to protect the cause. But again, *what* cause? To what purpose? What were the violent philosophical descendants of Guillaume de Matarese trying to achieve? Assassination, terrorism, indiscriminate bombings and riots, kidnapping and murder . . . all the things that men of wealth had to detest, for in the breakdown of order was their undoing. This was the giant contradiction. *Why?*

He felt the plane dip, the pilot was starting his descent into Essen.

Essen. Prince Andrei Voroshin. Whom had he become?

'I don't believe it!' exclaimed Heinrich Kassel over the telephone, his voice conveying the same good-natured incredulity Talenickov remembered from twelve years ago. 'Every time I pass the gardens in the Gruga, I pause for a moment and laugh. My wife

thinks it is a silly joke. . . . But a silly joke became an international spy and she's convinced it's an old girl-friend.'

'Meet me at the Gruga, please. It's urgent and has nothing to do with my former business.'

'Are you sure? It would not do for one of Essen's most prominent attorneys to have a Russian connection. These are odd times. Rumours abound that the Baader-Meinhof are financed by Moscow, that our neighbours to the far north are up to some nasty old tricks.'

Taleniekov paused for a moment, wincing at the coincidence. 'You have the word of an old conspirator. I'm unemployed.'

'Really? How interesting. Gruga Park then. It's almost noon. Shall we say one o'clock? Same place in the gardens, although there'll be no flowers this time of year.'

The ice on the pond glistened in the sunlight, the shrubbery curled for the cold of winter, yet briefly alive in the noonday warmth from the sky. Vasili sat on the bench; it was fifteen minutes past one and he felt the stirrings of concern. Without thinking, he touched the bulge in his right-hand pocket that was the small automatic he had purchased in Kopstadt Square, then took his hand away when he saw the hatless figure walking rapidly up the garden path.

Kassel had grown portly and nearly bald. In his large overcoat with the black fur lapels he was the image of a successful burgois, his obviously expensive attire at odds with Taleniekov's memory of the fiery young lawyer who had wanted to *keep you out of the yards out!* As he drew nearer, Taleniekov saw that the face was cherubic – a great deal of *Schlag* had gone down that throat, but the eyes were alive, still humorous . . . and sharp.

'I'm so sorry, my dear fellow,' said the German as Taleniekov got up and accepted the outstretched hand. 'A last-minute problem with an American contract.'

'That has a certain symmetry to it,' replied Vasili. 'When I returned to Moscow twelve years ago, I wrote in your file that I thought you were on Washington's payroll.'

'How perceptive. Actually, I'm paid out of New York, Detroit and Los Angeles, but why quibble over cities?'

'You look well, Heinrich. Quite prosperous. What happened to that very vocal champion of the underdog?'

'They made him an overdog.' The lawyer chuckled. 'It would never have happened if you people controlled the *Bundestag*. I'm an unprincipled capitalist who assuages his guilt with sizeable contributions to charity. My Reichmarks do far more than my vocal chords ever did.'

'A reasonable statement.'

'I'm a reasonable man. And what appears somewhat unreasonable to me now is why you would look me up. Not that I don't enjoy your company, for I do. But why now? You say you're not employed in your former profession; what could I possibly have that you'd be interested in?'

'Advice.'

'You have legal problems in *Essen*? Don't tell me a dedicated Communist has private investments in the Ruhr?'

'Only of time, and I have very little of that. I'm trying to trace a man, a family from Leningrad who came to Germany - to *Essen*, I'm convinced - between sixty and seventy years ago. I'm also convinced they entered illegally, and secretly bought into Ruhr industry.'

Kassel frowned. 'My dear fellow, you're mad. I'm trying to tick off the decades - I was never very good at figures - but if I'm not mistaken, you're referring to the period between 1910 and 1920. Is that correct?'

'Yes. They were turbulent times.'

'You don't say? There was merely the great war to the south, the bloodiest revolution in history in the north, mass confusion in the eastern Slavic states, the Atlantic ports in chaos, and the ocean a graveyard. In essence, all Europe was - if I may be permitted - in flames and *Esse*n itself experiencing an industrial expansion unseen before or since, including the Hitler years. Everything, naturally, was secret, fortunes made every day. Into this insanity comes one White Russian selling his jewels - as hundreds did - to buy himself a piece of the pie in any of a dozen companies, and you expect me to find him?'

'I thought that might be your reaction.'

'What other could I possibly have?' Kassel laughed again. 'What is the name of this man?'

'For your own good, I'd rather not tell you.'

'Then how can I help you?'

'By telling me where you would look first if you were me.'

'In Russia.'

'I did. The Revolutionary archives. In Leningrad.'

'You found nothing?'

'On the contrary. I found a detailed description of a mass family suicide so patently at odds with reality that it had to be false.'

'How was this suicide described? Not the particulars, just in general.'

'The family's estate was stormed by the mobs; they fought all day, but in the end used the remaining explosives and blew themselves up with the main house.'

'One family holding off a rioting mob of Bolsheviks for an entire day? Hardly likely.'

'Precisely. Yet the account was as detailed as a von Clausewitz exercise, even to the climate and the brightness of the sky. Every inch of the vast estate was described, but apart from the name of the family itself, not one other identity was entered. There were no witnesses listed to confirm the event.'

The attorney frowned again. 'Why did you just say that "every inch of the vast estate was described"?'

'It was.'

'But why?'

'To lend credibility to the false account, I assume. A profusion of detail.'

'Too profuse, perhaps. Tell me, were the actions of this family on that day described in your usual enemies-of-the-people vitriol?'

Taleniekov thought back. 'No, they weren't actually. They would almost be termed individual acts of courage.' Then he remembered specifically. 'They released their servants before they risk their own lives . . . they *released* them. That *wasn't* a normal thing.'

'And the inclusion of such a generous act in a revolutionary's account would not really be all that acceptable, would it?'

'What are you driving at?'

'That account may have been written by the man himself, or a literate member of the family, and then passed on through corrupt channels to the archives.'

'Entirely possible, but I still don't understand your point.'

'The odds are long, I grant you, but bear with me. Over the years I've learned that when a client is asked to outline a deposition, he always shows himself in the best light; that's understandable. But he also invariably includes trivial particulars about things that mean a great deal to him. They slip out unconsciously: a lovely wife or a beautiful child, a profitable business or a . . . beautiful home. "Every inch of the vast estate." That was this family's passion, wasn't it? Land. Property.'

'Yes,' Vasili recalled Mikovsky's descriptions of the Voroshin estates. How the patriarchs were absolute rulers over the land, even to holding their own courts of law. 'You could say they were excessively addicted to property.'

'Might they have brought this addiction to Germany?'

'They might have. Why?'

The attorney's eyes turned cold. 'Before I answer that, I must ask the old conspirator a very serious question. Is this search a Soviet reprisal of some sort? You say you're unemployed, that you're not working at your former occupation, but what proof do I have?'

Taleniekov breathed deeply, levelling his eyes with the German's. 'I could say the word of a KGB strategist who altered an enemy's file twelve years ago, but I'll go farther than that. If you have connections with Bonn intelligence and can inquire discreetly, ask them about me. Moscow has sentenced me to death.'

The coldness thawed in Kassel's eyes, 'You wouldn't say such a thing if it weren't true. An attorney who deals every day with ... too easily. But you were a

'Then surely an enormous mistake has been made.'

all I can say. Now, I've answered your serious question very seriously. Answer mine. What was your point regarding this family's preoccupation with the land?'

The lawyer pursed his thick lips, squinted at Taleniekov, then sighed as he spoke. 'Tell me the name. I may be able to help you.'

'How?'

'The Records of Property that are filed in the State House. There were rumours that several of the great estates in Rellinghausen and Stadtwald - those on the northern shores of Lake Baldency - were bought by Russians decades ago.'

'They would not have bought in their own name, I'm certain of that.'

'Probably not. I said the odds were long, but the covert acquisition of property is not unlike depositions. Things slip out.

Possession of land is very close to a man's view of himself; in some cultures he is the land.'

'Why can't I look for myself? If the records are available, tell me where to find them.'

'It wouldn't do you any good. Only certified attorneys are permitted to search the titles. Tell me the name.'

'It could be dangerous for anyone who looks,' said Talenicko quietly.

'Oh, *come* now.' Kassel laughed, his eyes amused again. 'A seventy-year-old purchase of land.'

'I believe there's a direct connection between that purchase and the extreme acts of violence that are occurring everywhere today.'

'Extreme acts of . . .' The lawyer trailed off the phrase; his expression solemn. 'An hour ago I mentioned Baader-Meinhof on the phone. Your silence was quite loud. Are you suggesting? . . .'

'I'd rather not suggest anything,' interrupted Vasili. 'You're a prominent man, a resourceful man. Give me a letter of certification and get me into the Records of Property.'

The German shook his head. 'No, I won't do that. You wouldn't know what to look for. But you may accompany me.'

'You'd do this yourself? Why?'

'I despise extremists who deal in violence. I remember too vividly the screams and diatribes of the Third Reich. I shall indeed, look for myself, and if we get lucky you can tell me what you wish.' Kassel lightened his voice, but sadness was there. 'Besides, anyone sentenced to death by Moscow cannot be all bad. Now, tell me the name.'

Talenickov stared at the attorney, seeing another sentence of death. 'Voroshin,' he said.

The uniformed clerk in the Essen Hall of Records, *Eigentum Abteilung*, treated the prominent Heinrich Kassel with extreme deference. Herr Kassel's firm was one of the most important in the city. He made it plain that the receptionist behind the desk would be delighted to make copies of anything Herr Kassel wished to have duplicated.

The steel filing cabinets in the enormous room that housed the Records of Property were like grey robots stacked one on

top of the other, circling the room, staring down at the open cubicles where the certified lawyers did their research.

'Everything is recorded by date,' said Kassel. 'Year, month, day. Be as specific as you can. What was the earliest Voroshin might have reasonably bought property in the Essen districts?'

'Allowing for the slow methods of travel at the time, say late May or early June of 1911. But I told you, he wouldn't have bought under his own name.'

'We won't be looking for his name, or even an assumed name. Not to begin with.'

'Why not an assumed name? Why couldn't he arrive and buy what was available under another name if he had the funds?'

'Because of the times, and they haven't changed that much. A man does not simply enter a community with his family and proceed to assume ownership of a large estate without arousing curiosity. This Voroshin, as you've described him, would hardly have wanted that. He would establish a false identity very slowly, very carefully.'

'Then what do we look for?'

'A purchase made by attorneys for owners *in absentia* or by a trust legation from a bank for an estate investment; or by officers of a company or a limited partnership for acquisition purposes. There are any number of ways to set up concealed ownership, but eventually the calendar runs out; the owners want to move in. It's always the pattern, whether you talk about a sweet shop or a conglomerate or a large estate. All the legal manoeuvres are no match for human nature.' Kassel paused, looking at the grey cabinets. 'Come. We'll start with the month of May 1911. If there's anything here it may not be that difficult to find. There were no more than thirty or forty such estates in the whole of the Ruhr, perhaps ten to fifteen in the Rellinghausen-Stadtswald districts.'

Taleniekov felt the same anticipation he had experienced with Yanov Mikovsky in the archives in Leningrad. The same feeling of peeling away layers of time, looking for a clue in documents recorded with precision decades ago. But now he was awed by the seeming irrelevancies that Heinrich Kassel spotted and extracted from the thick pages of legals. The attorney was like a child in that sweet shop he had referred to; a picking expert whose eyes roamed over the jellybeans and the no-nickles out the flawed items for sale.

'Here. Learn something, my international spy. This tract of land in Bredeney, thirty-seven acres in the Baldeney valley - ideal for someone like Voroshin. It was purchased by the Staatsbank of Duisburg for the minors of a family in Remscheid.'

'What's the name?'

'It's irrelevant. A device. We find out who moved in a year or so after, *that's* the name we want.'

'You think it may be Voroshin. Under his new identity?'

'Don't jump. There are others like this.' Kassel laughed. 'I had no idea my predecessors were so full of legal caprice; it's positively shocking. Look,' he said, pulling out another sheaf of papers, his eyes automatically riveted on an indented clause on the first page. 'Here's another. A cousin of the Krupps is transferring ownership of property in Rellinghausen to a woman in Düsseldorf in gratitude for her many years of service. Really!'

'It's possible, isn't it?'

'Of course not; the family would never permit it. A relative found a way to make a handsome profit by selling to someone who did not want his peers - or his creditors - to know he had the money. Someone who controlled the woman in Düsseldorf, if she ever existed. The Krupps probably congratulated their n.'

so it went. 1911, 1912, 1913, 1914 . . . 1915.

August 1915.

he name was there. It meant nothing to Heinrich Kassel, but it did to Taleniekov. It brought to mind another document, two thousand miles away in the archives in Leningrad. The crimes of the family Voroshin, the intimate associates of Prince Andrei.

Friedrich Schotte.

'Wait a minute!' Vasili placed his hand over the pages. 'When this?'

'Stadtwald. There's nothing irregular here. As a matter of fact it's absolutely legal; very clean.'

'Perhaps too legal, too clean. Just as the Voroshin mass was too profuse with detail.'

'What in God's name are you talking about?'

'What do you know of this Friedrich Schotte?'

The attorney grimaced in thought, trying to recollect history: this was not what he was looking for. 'H

Vasili picked up the pages in front of the attorney. 'You said it yourself, Heinrich. Voroshin would build a false identity very slowly, very carefully. That's exactly what he did; he simply began five or six years before I thought he had. I'm sure if such records were kept or memories could be activated, we'd find that Her Verachten came first to Essen alone, until he was established. A man of wealth, testing new waters for investments and a future, bringing with him a carefully constructed history from faraway Munich, money flowing through the Austrian banks. So simple and the times were so right!'

Suddenly Kassel frowned. 'His wife,' said the lawyer quietly. 'What about his wife?'

'She was not a Municher. She was Hungarian, from a wealthy family in Debrecen, it was said. Her German was never very good.'

'Translated, she was from Leningrad and a poor linguist. What was Verachten's full name?'

'Ansel Verachten,' said the attorney, his eyes now on Taleniekov. '*Ansel*.'

'*Andrei*.' Vasili let the pages fall. 'It's incredible how the ego strives to be sublime, isn't it? Meet Prince Andrei Voroshin.'

They strolled across the Gildenplatz, the Kaffee Hag building blazing with the light, the Bosch insignia subdued but prominent below the enormous clock. It was eight in the evening now, the sky dark, the air cold. It was not a good night for walking, but Talenickov and Kassel had spent nearly six hours in the Records of Property; the wind that blew across the square was refreshing.

'Nothing should shock a German from the Ruhr,' said the lawyer, shaking his head. 'After all, we are the Zürich of the north. But this is incredible. And I know only a *part* of the story. You won't reconsider and tell me the rest?'

'One day I may.'

'That's too cryptic. Say what you mean.'

'If I'm alive.' Vasil looked at Kassel. 'Tell me everything you can about the Verachtens.'

'There isn't that much. The wife died in the mid-'thirties, I think. One son and a daughter-in-law were killed in a bombing raid during the war, I remember that. The bodies weren't found for several days, buried under the rubble as so many were. Ansel lived to a ripe old age, somehow avoiding the war-crimes penalties that caught the Krupps. He died in style, heart seizure while on horseback some time in the fifties.'

'Who's left?'

'Walther Verachten, his wife and their daughter; she ~~was~~ married, but it didn't prevent her from enjoying ~~her~~ pleasures.'

off the engine, got out and retraced the car's path, pulling up the bushes until he reached the road fifteen feet away. He stood on the shoulder and examined the camouflage; in the darkness, it was sufficient. He started back towards the Verachten wall.

If he could get over it without setting off any alarms, he knew he could reach the house. There was no way to scan a forest electronically; wires and cells were too easily tripped by animals and birds. It was the wall itself that had to be negotiated. He reached it and studied the brick in the flame of his cigarette lighter. There were no devices of any sort. It was an ordinary brick wall, its very ordinariness misleading, and Vasili knew it. There was a tall oak on his right, limbs curling up above the top of the wall, but not extending over it.

He leaped; his hands clawing the bark, his knees vicing the trunk; he scaled up to the first limb, swinging his leg over it, pulling himself up into a sitting position, his back against the tree. He leaned forward and downward, his hands balancing his body on the limb until he was prone, and studied the top of the wall in the dim light. He found what he knew had to be there.

Grooved into the flat surface of the concrete was a criss-crossing network of wire-coated plastic tubing through which air and current flowed. The electricity was of sufficient voltage to inhibit animals from gnawing at the plastic, and the air pressure was calibrated to set off alarms the instant a given amount of weight fell over the tube. The alarms were undoubtedly received in a scanning room in the compound, where instruments selected the point of penetration. Talenickov knew the system was practically fail-safe; if one strand was shorted out, there were five or six others to back it up, and the pressure of a knife across the wire coating would be enough to set off the alarm.

But practically fail-safe was not totally fail-safe. Fire. Melting the plastic and releasing the air without the pressure of a blade. The only alarm set off in this was that of malfunction; the trace would begin where the system originated, which had to be much nearer the house.

He estimated the distance between the edge of the tree limb and the top of the wall. If he could loop his leg as close to the end as possible, swing underneath and brace himself with one hand against the ridge of the wall, his free hand could hold his lighter against the successive tubes of plastic.

He got to his knees, listening for any sounds of an alert. There were none, so he rose to his feet and started threading his way through the dense woods towards what he presumed to be the central area of the property. The fact that he was half-walking, half-crawling in the right direction was confirmed in less than a minute. He could see the lights of the main house filtered through the trees, the beginning of a large expanse of lawn clearer with each step.

The glow of a cigarette! He dropped to the ground. Directly ahead, perhaps fifty feet away, stood a man at the edge of the lawn. Instantly, Talenikov was aware of the forest breezes; he listened for the sounds of an animal.

Nothing. There were no dogs. Walther Verachten had confidence in his electronic gates and sophisticated alarm system; he needed only human patrols to make the darkness of his compound secure.

Vasili inched forward, his eyes on the guard ahead. The man was in uniform, visored hat and a heavy winter jacket pinched at the waist by a thick belt that held a holster gun. The guard checked his watch and stripped his cigarette, shaking the tobacco to the grass; he had been in the military, for it was a military custom. He walked several paces to his left, stretched, yawned, proceeded another twenty feet, then strolled aimlessly back towards where he had been standing. That short stretch of his post, other guards were no doubt stationed every several hundred feet, ringing the main house like Caesar's Praetorian Guard. But these were neither Caesar's times nor Caesar's dangers; the duty was boring, relieved by openly smoked cigarettes and yawns and aimless wandering. The guard would not be a problem.

But getting across the stretch of lawn to the shadows of the drive on the right side of the house might well be. He would have to walk briefly in the glare of the floodlights that shot down from the roof.

A hatless man in a dark sweater and trousers doing such a thing would be ordered to stop, shot at if he did not. But a guard dressed in a visored cap and a heavy jacket with a holster at his side would not cause so much concern. And if reprimanded, that guard could always return to his post; it was important to bear that in mind.

Talenikov crawled through the underbrush, elbows and knees

working on the hard ground, pausing with every snap of branch, blending what noise he made into the sounds of the night forest. He was within five feet, a spray of juniper between himself and the guard. The bored man reached into his jacket pocket and took out his pack of cigarettes. It was not the moment for the striking of a match; the juniper was too thin and a moment bent his head in the cold to light a cigarette.

It was the moment to move. Now. Vasili sprang up, his left hand clutching the guard's throat, his left heel dug into the earth to provide backward leverage. In one motion, he pulled the man off his feet, arcing him down into the juniper bush, crashing the guard's skull into the ground, his fingers clawing the windpipe, tightening around it. The shock of the assault combined with the blow to the head and the choking of air rendered the man unconscious. There was a time when Taleniekov would have finished the job, killing the guard because it was the most practical thing to do, that time was past. This was no soldier of the Matarese, there was no point in his death. He removed the man's jacket and visored hat, put them on quickly and buckled the holster around his waist. He dragged the guard farther into the woods, angled the head into the dirt, removed his own small weapon and smashed the handle down above the man's right ear. He would remain unconscious for hours; if the time was not sufficient, nothing was.

Vasili crept back to the edge of the lawn, stood up, breathed deeply and started across the grass. He had watched the guard walk - a slight casual swagger, the neck settled, the head angled back, and he imitated the memory. With each step he expected a loud rebuke or an order or an inquiry; if any were shouted he would shrug and return to the man's post. None came. He reached the drive and the shadows. Fifty yards down the driveway there was a light streaming out of an open door and the figure of a woman opening a garbage can, two paper bags in her feet. Vasili walked faster, his decision made. He approached the woman; she was in the white uniform of a maid. Excuse me, the captain ordered me to bring a message to Mr Verachten.

"Who the hell are you?" asked the stocky woman. "I'm new. Here, let me help you." Taleniekov picked up the bags. "You are new. It's Helga this, Helga that. What do they care? It's the message? I'll take it to him."

'I wish I could give it to you. I've never met the old man and I don't want to, but that's what I was told to do.'

'They're all farts down there. *Kommandos!* A bunch of beer-soaked ruffians, I say. But you're better looking than most of them.'

'Herr Verachten, please? I was told to hurry.'

'Everything's hurry this and hurry that. It's ten o'clock. The old fool's wife is in her rooms and he's in his chapel, of course.'

'Where? ...'

'Oh, all right. Come on in, I'll show you . . . You *are* better looking, more polite, too. Stay that way.'

Helga led him through a corridor that ended at a door opening into a large entrance hall. Here the walls were covered with numerous Renaissance oil paintings, the colours vivid and dramatic under pinpoint spotlights. They extended up a wide circular staircase, the steps of Italian marble. Branching off the hall were several larger rooms, and the brief glimpses Taleniev had of them confirmed Heinrich Kassel's description of a house filled with priceless antiques. But the glimpses were brief; the maid turned the corner beyond the staircase and they approached a thick mahogany door filled with ornate biblical carvings. She opened it and they descended steps carpeted in scarlet until they reached some kind of ante-room, the floor marble like the staircase in the great hall, the walls here covered with tapestries depicting early Christian scenes. An ancient church pew was on the left, the bas-relief examples of an art long forgotten; it was a place of meditation, for the tapestry facing it was of the Stations of the Cross. At the end of the small room was an arched door, beyond it obviously Walther Verachten's chapel.

'You can interrupt, if you want to,' said Helga without enthusiasm. 'The head *Kommando* will be blamed for it, not you. But I'd wait a few minutes; the priest will be finished with his claptrap by then.'

'A priest?' The word slipped out of Vasili's throat; the presence of such a man was the farthest thing in his mind. A *consigliere* of the Matarese with a priest?

'His fart-filled holiness, that's what I say.' Helga turned and started back. 'Do as you wish,' she said shrugging. 'I don't tell anybody what to do.'

Taleniev waited for the heavy mahogany door above to open

with his hands. Steadying himself, he brought them up to his face, covering his eyes as if they had been clawed or burned. The priest dropped to his knees, grabbing the old man by the shoulders, embracing him. The cleric turned to Vasili, his voice harsh.

'Who are you?' What *right* have you?'

'Don't talk to me of rights, *priest*! You turn my stomach. Parasite!'

The priest held his place, cradling the white-haired Verachten. 'I was summoned years ago and I came. Like my predecessors in this house, I ask for nothing and I receive nothing.'

The old man lowered his hands from his face, struggling to compose himself, nodding his trembling head; the priest released him. 'So you've come at last,' he said. 'They always said you would. Vengeance is the Lord's, but then you people do not accept that, do you? You've taken God from the people and given so little in return. I have no quarrel with you on this earth. Take my life, Bolshevik. Carry out your orders, but let this good priest go. He's no Voroshin.'

'You are, however.'

'It is my burden.' Verachten's voice grew firmer. 'And our secret. I've borne both well, as God has given me the vision to do so.'

'One talks of rights, the other of God!' spat out Taleniekov. 'Hypocrites!' And then he shouted; '*Perro nostro circulo!*'

The old man blinked, no reaction in them whatsoever. 'I beg your pardon?'

'You heard me! *Perro nostro circulo!*'

'I hear you, but I don't understand you.'

'Corsica! Porto Vecchio! *Guillaume de Matarese!*'

Verachten looked up at the priest, 'Am I senile, my father? What's he talking about?'

'Explain yourself,' said the priest curtly. 'Who are you? What do you want? What's the meaning of these words?'

'He knows!'

'I know *what*?' Verachten leaned forward. 'We Voroshins have blood on our souls, I accept that. But I cannot accept what I don't know.'

'The *shepherd boy*,' said Taleniekov with quiet condemnation. 'With a voice crueller than the wind. Do you need more than that? The shepherd boy!'

With those few words, Odile Verachten nodded at her escort. He shifted the weapon to his left and fired. The explosion was deafening; the old man fell. The killer raised his gun and fired again; the priest spun, the top of his head blown away.

Silence.

'That was one of the most brutal acts I've ever witnessed,' said Taleniekov, the final decision of his life being made. He would kill . . . *somehow*.

'From Vasili Vasilievich Taleniekov, that's quite a statement,' said the Verachten woman, taking a step forward. 'Did you really believe that this ineffectual old man – this would-be priest – could be a part of *us*?'

'My error was in the man, not in the name. Voroshin is Matarése.'

'Correction. Verachten. We are not merely born, we are chosen.' Odile gestured at her dead father. 'He never was. When his brother was killed during the war, Ansel chose me!' She glared at him. 'We wondered what you had learned in Leningrad.'

'Would you really like to know?'

'A name,' answered the woman. 'A name from a chaotic period in recent history. Voroshin. But it hardly matters that you know. There is nothing you could say, no accusation you could make, that the Verachtens could not deny.'

'You don't *know* that.'

'We know enough, don't we?' said Odile, glancing at the man with the gun.

'We know enough,' repeated the killer. 'I missed you in Leningrad. But I did not miss the woman, Kronescha, did I? If you know what I mean.'

'*You!*' Taleniekov started forward; the man clicked the gun's hammer back with his thumb.

Vasili held his place, body and mind aching. He *would* kill; to do so control had to be found. And shock. *Lodzia my Lodzial Help me.*

He stared at Odile Verachten, and spoke the words softly, slowly, giving each equal emphasis. '*Perro . . . nostro . . . circolo.*' The smile faded from her lips, her white skin grew paler. 'Again from the past. From a primitive people who don't know what they're saying. We should have known you might learn it.'

'You believe that? You think they don't know what they're saying?'

lid not commit suicide. He then spread the stole and ran his hand over her body, pulling her off the floor, and reaching around her back, pushing her down again and plunging his hand between her legs, ankles to pelvis, feeling for the hard metal of a gun or a knife. There was nothing. 'Get up!' he ordered.

She rose only partially, her knees pulled up under her, holding her neck. 'You must tell me!' she whispered. 'You know you can't get out. Don't be a fool, Russian! Save your life! What do you know of the shepherd?' Odile Verachten screamed:

'What am I offered to tell you?'

'What do you want?'

'What does the *Matarese* want!?'

The woman paused. 'Order.'

'Through *chaos*?'

'Yes! The shepherd? In the name of God, tell me!'

'I'll tell you when we're out of the compound.'

'No! Now.'

'Do you think I'd trade that off?' He pulled her to her feet. 'We're leaving now. Your friend here will wake up before too long; he'll know what to do, it's part of his job. If it wasn't I'd kill him. But you and I will be far away when he kills himself.'

'No!'

'Then you'll die,' said Taleniekov simply. 'I got in, I'll get

I gave orders! No one's to leave!'

'Who's leaving? A uniformed guard returns to his post. Those aren't *Matarese* out there. They're exactly what they're supposed to be: former *Kommandos* hired to protect a wealthy executive.' Vasili jammed the gun into her throat. 'Your choice? It doesn't matter to me.'

She flinched; he grabbed the back of her neck, pulling it into the barrel. She nodded. 'We will talk in my father's car,' she whispered. 'We're both civilized people. You have information I need, and I have a revelation for you. You have nowhere to turn but to us now. It could be far worse for you.'

He sat next to her in the front seat of Walther Verachten's limousine. He had taken off the uniform and was now no more than another stud in Odile Verachten's stable. She was behind the wheel, his arm around her shoulders, his automatic again jammed into her, out of sight. As the guard at the gatehouse nodded and turned to press the release button, he leaned into her;

Vasili shook his head. 'Sorry, you first. Who are the Matarese? What are they? What are they doing?'

'Your first answer,' said Odile, parting her stole, her hand on the neckline of her gown. She ripped it downward, the white buttons breaking from the threads, exposing her breasts. 'It's on we know you've found,' she added.

In the moonlight Taleniekov saw it. Larger than he had seen before, a jagged circle that was part of the breast, part of the body. The mark of the Matarese. 'The grave in the hills of Corsica,' he said quietly. '*Perro nostro circolo.*'

'It can be yours,' said Odile, reaching out to him. 'How many lovers have lain across these breasts and admired my very distinctive birthmark. You are the best, Taleniekov. Join the best. Let me bring you over!'

'A little while ago, you said I had no choice. That you would reveal something to me, force me to turn to you. What is it?'

Odile pulled the top of her gown together. 'The American is dead. You are alone.'

'What?'

'Scofield was killed.'

'Where?'

'In Washington . . .'

The sound of a powerful engine interrupted her words. Headlights pierced the darkness of the road that wound out of the woods from the south; a car came into view. Then suddenly, as if suspended in a black void, it stopped on the shoulder behind the limousine. Before the headlights could be extinguished, three men could be seen leaping out, the driver following. All were armed; two carried rifles. All were predators.

'They've found me!' cried Odile Verachten. 'Your answer, Taleniekov! You really have no choice, you see that, don't you? Give me the gun. An order from me can change your life. Without it, you're dead.'

Stunned, Vasili looked behind him; the fields stretched into pastures, the pastures into darkness. Escape was not a problem—perhaps not even the right decision. Scofield dead? In Washington? He had been on his way to England; what had sent him prematurely to Washington? But Odile Verachten was not lying; he would bank his life on it! She had spoken the truth as she knew the truth—just as her offer was made in truth. The

He had to join Beowulf Agate in England.

Two of the names on the guest list of Guillaume de Matarese seventy years ago were accounted for.

Scozzi. Dead.

Voroshin-Verachten. Dead.

Sacrificed.

The direct descendants were expendable, which meant they were not the true inheritors of the Corsican *padrone*. They had been merely messengers, bearing gifts for others far more powerful, far more capable of spreading the Corsican fever.

This world needs killers?

To save it from killers! Odile Verachten.

Enigma.

David Waverly, Foreign Secretary, Great Britain.

Joshua Appleton IV, Senator, United States Congress.

Were they, too, expendable messengers? Or were they something else? Did each carry the mark of the jagged blue circle on his chest? Had Scozzi? And if either did, or Scozzi had, was that unnatural blemish the mark of mystical distinction Odile Verachten had thought it was, or was it, too, something else? A symbol of expendability, perhaps. For it occurred to Vasili that wherever that mark appeared, death was a partner.

Scofield was searching in England now. The same Beowulf that someone within the Matarese had reported killed in Creek Park. Who was that someone, and why had the false report gone out? It was as though that person – or persons – wanted Scofield spared, beyond reach of the Matarese killers. But why?

You talk of the shepherd. He knows! Can you doubt it?

The shepherd. A shepherd boy.

Enigma.

Taleniekov put the tea down on the tray in front of him, his elbow jarred by his seat companion. The businessman from Essen had fallen asleep, his arm protruding over the divider. Vasili was about to remove it when his eyes fell on the folded newspaper spread out on the German's lap.

The photograph stared up at him and he stopped breathing, sharp bolts of pain returning to his chest – as they had in Leningrad.

The smiling, gentle face was that of Heinrich Kassel. The bold print above the photograph screamed the information.

Идулат toi

Talenickov reached over and picked up the paper, the pain accelerating as he read:

Heinrich Kassel, one of Essen's most prominent attorneys, was found murdered in his car outside his residence last evening. The authorities have called the killing bizarre and brutal. Kassel was found garrotted, with multiple head injuries and lacerations of the face and body. An odd aspect of the killing was the tearing of the victim's upper clothing, exposing the chest area on which was painted a circle of dark blue. The paint was still wet when the body was discovered shortly past midnight . . .

Perro nostro circulo

Vasili closed his eyes. He had pronounced Kassel's sentence of death with the name Voroshin.

It had been carried out.

2 f 4 2 2

Book III

'*Scofield?*' The grey-faced man was astonished, the name uttered in shock.

Bray broke into a run through the crowds in the London Underground; towards the Charing Cross exit. It had happened; it was bound to happen sooner or later. No brim of a hat could conceal a face if trained eyes saw that face, and no unusual clothing dissuaded the professional once the face had been marked.

He had just been marked; the man making the identification – and without question now racing to a phone – was a veteran agent for the Central Intelligence Agency stationed at the American Embassy on Grosvenor Square. Scofield knew him slightly; one or two lunches at The Guinea; two or three conferences, inevitably held prior to Consular Operations invading areas the Company considered possessively sacrosanct. Nothing close, only cold; the man was a fighter for CIA prerogatives and Beowulf Agate had transgressed too frequently.

Goddamn it! Within minutes the U.S. network in London would be put on alert, within hours every available man, woman and paid informer would spread throughout the city looking for him. It was conceivable that even the British would be called in, but it was not likely. Those in Washington who wanted Brandon Alan Scofield wanted him dead, not questioned, and this was not the English style. No, the British would be avoided.

Bray counted on it. There was a man he had helped several

the winding back streets into Haymarket.

He chose a telephone box, went inside and closed the glass door, wishing it were solid. It was ten minutes to seven. Antonia would be waiting by the phone. They always allowed a variable of half an hour for cross-Channel telephone traffic; if he did not reach her by 8.15, Paris time, she could expect his next call between 11.45 and 12.15. The one condition Toni had insisted upon was for them to talk to each other every day. Bray had not objected; he had come out of the earth and found something very precious to him, something he had thought he had lost permanently. He could love again; the excitement of anticipation had come back. The sound of a voice stirred him, the touch of a hand was meaningful. He had found Antonia Gravat at the most inopportune time of his life, yet finding her gave a significance to his life he had not felt for a number of years. He wanted to live and grow old with her, it was as simple as that. And remarkable. He had never thought about growing old before; it was time he did.

If the Matarese allowed it.

The *Matarese*. An international power without a profile, its leaders faceless men trying to achieve *what*?

Chaos? *Why*?

Chaos. Scofield was suddenly struck by the root meaning of word. The state of formless matter, of clashing bodies in *chaos*, before the creation. Before order was imposed on the *verse*.

He dialled the code. Antonia answered quickly.

'Vasili's here,' she said. 'This afternoon. He's hurt.'

'How badly?'

'His neck. He should have stitches.'

There was a brief hollow sound as the phone was being passed. Or taken.

'He should have sleep,' said Taleniekov in English. 'But I have things to tell you first, several warnings.'

'What about Voroshin?'

'He kept the V for practical if foolish purposes. He became Essen's *Verachten*. Ansel *Verachten*.'

'The *Verachten* Works?'

'Yes.'

'Good Christ!'

'His son believed that.'

'What?'

'It's irrelevant, there's too much to tell you. His granddaughter was the chosen one. She's dead, killed on Matarese orders.'

'As Scorzi was,' interrupted Scofield.

'Exactly' agreed the Soviet. 'They were vessels; they carried the plans but were commandeered by others. It will be interesting to see what happens to the Verachten companies. They have no leadership now. We must watch and note who assumes control.'

'We've reached the same conclusion then,' said Bray. 'The Matarese work through large corporations.'

'It would appear so, but to what end I haven't the faintest idea. It's extremely contradictory.'

'Chaos...' Scorzi spoke the word softly.

'I beg your pardon.'

'Nothing. You said you wanted to warn me.'

'Yes. They've studied our files under microscopes. It seems they know every driver we've ever used, every past friend, every contact, even our father and lover. Be careful.'

'They can't know what was never entered; they can't cover everyone.'

'Don't back on it. You received my cable about the body marks?'

'It's crazy.' Scorzi's fingers identifying themselves? I'm not sure I believe it.

'Believe it, said T. or Khov finally. 'But there's something I wasn't able to explain. They're suicidal; they won't be taken. Which helps me believe they're not as extensive in numbers as the leaders would like us to think. They're some kind of elite soldiers get out of the troubled areas, not to be confused with hired gunners in the second and third parties.'

Bray passed the word along. 'You know what you're describing, don't you?'

a pilot and a plane in the Cap Gris district; I've done it before. There's a private airfield between Hythe and Ashford. I should be in London by one o'clock or three at the latest. I know where you're staying, the girl told me.'

'Taleniekov.'

'Yes?'

'Her name's Antonia.'

'I know that.'

'Let me speak to her.'

'Of course. Here she is.'

He found the name in the London directory: *R. Symonds, Bradbry Lane, Chelsea*. He memorized the number and placed the first call at 7.30 from a booth in Piccadilly Circus. The woman who answered told him politely that Mr Symonds was on his way home from the office.

'He should be here any mo' now. Shall I tell him who called?'

'The name wouldn't mean anything. I'll call in a while, thank you.'

'He's got a marvellous memory. You're sure you don't care to leave your name?'

'I'm sure, thank you.'

'He's coming directly from the office.'

'Yes, I understand that.'

Scofield hung up, disturbed. He left the booth and walked down Piccadilly past Fortnum and Mason's to St James's Street and beyond. There was another booth at the entrance to Green Park; slightly more than ten minutes had passed. He wanted to hear the woman's voice again.

'Has your husband arrived?' he asked.

'He just called from the local, the Brace and Bit on Old Church Street. He's quite irritable. Must have had a *dreadful* day.'

Bray hung up. He knew the number of MI6-London; it was one a member of the fraternity kept in mind. He dialled.

'Mr Symonds, please. Priority.'

'Right away, sir.'

Roger Symonds was not on his way home, nor was he in a pub called The Brace and Bit. Was he playing a domestic game?

'Symonds here,' said the familiar English voice in the familiar casual tone Scofield remembered.

'Your wife just told me you were on your way home, but got

detained at the Brace and Bit. Is that the best you could come up with?

'I what? . . . Who's this?'

'An old friend.'

'Not much of a one, I'm afraid. I'm not married. My friends know that.'

Bray paused, then spoke urgently. 'Quickly. Give me a sterile number, or one on a scrambler. *Quickly!*'

'Who is this?'

'Two thousand pounds.'

It took Symonds less than a second to understand and adjust; he reeled off a number, repeated it once, then added. 'The cellars. Twenty-five storeys high.'

There was a click; the line went dead. Twenty-five storeys high to the cellars meant halving the figure, minus one. He was to call the number in exactly twelve minutes - within the one-minute span - when scrambling and jamming devices would be activated. He left the booth to find another as far away as time and rapid walking permitted. Telephone intercepts were potentially two-way traces; the booth at Green Park could be under observation in a matter of minutes.

He went up Old Bond Street into New until he reached Oxford Street, where he turned right and began running. At Wardour Street he slowed down, turned right again, and melted into the crowds of Soho.

Elapsed time: nine and a half minutes.

There was a booth at the corner of Shaftesbury Avenue; inside a callow young man wearing an electric-blue suit was screaming into the phone. Scofield waited by the door, looking at his watch.

Eleven minutes.

He could not take the chance. He took out a five-pound note and tapped on the glass. The young man turned; he saw the bill and held up his middle finger in a gesture that was not co-operative.

Bray opened the door, put his left hand on the electric-blue shoulder, tightened his grip, and as the offensive young man began screeching, pulled him out of the booth, tripping him with his left foot, dropping the fiver on top of him. It floated; the youth grabbed it and ran.

Eleven minutes, thirty seconds.

Scofield took several deep breaths, trying to slow the rapid pounding of his chest. Twelve minutes. He dialled.

'Don't go home,' said Bray the instant Symonds was on the line.

'Don't *you* stay in London!' was the reply. 'Grosvenor Square has an alert out for you.'

'You *know*? Washington called *you* in?'

'Hardly. They won't say a word about you. You're terminated personnel, an off-limits subject. We probed several weeks ago when we first got word.'

'Word from *where*?'

'Our sources in the Soviet. In KGB. They're after you, too, but then they always have been.'

'What did Washington say when you probed?'

'Played it down. Failure to report whereabouts, something like that. They're too embarrassed to put an official stamp on the nonsense. Are you authoring something? There's a lot of that over there ...'

'How did you ~~know~~ know about the alert?' interrupted Scofield. 'The one out for me now?'

'Oh, come now, we do keep tabs, you know. A number of those Grosvenor Square has on its payroll quite rightly have si loyalties to us.'

ay paused briefly, bewildered. 'Roger, why are you telling this? I can't believe two thousand pounds would make you do it.'

'That misappropriated sum has been sitting in a Chelsea bank drawing interest for you since the morning after you bailed me out.'

'Then why?'

Symonds cleared his throat, a proper Englishman facing the necessity of showing emotion. 'I have no idea what your quarrel is over there and I'm not sure I care to know - you have such puritanical outbursts - but I was appalled to learn that our prime source in Washington confirmed that the State Department subscribes to the Soviet ploy. As I said, it's not only nonsense, I find it patently offensive.'

'A ploy? What ploy?'

'That you joined forces with the Serpent.'

'The "Serpent"?'

'It's what we call Vasili Taleniekov, a name I'm sure you

recall. To repeat, I don't know what your trouble is, but I do know a goddamned lie, a macabre lie at that, when I hear one.' Symonds cleared his throat again. 'Some of us remember East Berlin. And I was here when you came back from Prague. How dare they . . . after what you've *done*? Churlish bastards!'

Scofield took a long, deep breath. 'Roger, don't go home.' 'Yes, you said that before.' Symonds was relieved they were back to practicality; it was in his voice. 'You say someone's there, claiming to be my wife?'

'Probably not inside, but nearby, with a clear view. They've tapped into your phone and the equipment's good. No echoes, no static.'

'My phone? They're trailing me? In London?'

'They're covering you; they're after me. They knew we were friends and thought I might try to reach you.'

'Goddamned cheek! That embassy will get a bolt that'll char the gold feathers off that fucking ridiculous eagle! They go too far!'

'It's not the Americans.'

'Not the? . . . Bray, what in God's name are you talking about?'

'That's just it. We have to talk. But it's got to be a very complicated route. Two networks are looking for me, and one of them has you under glass. They're good.'

'We'll see about that,' snapped Symonds, annoyed, challenged and curious. 'I daresay several vehicles, one or two decoys, and a healthy bit of official lying can do the trick. Where are you?'

'Soho, Wardour and Shaftesbury.'

'Good. Head over to Tottenham Court Road. In about

will make a remarkable recovery.'

'Thank you, Roger.'

'Not at all. But don't expect me to have the two thousand quid. The banks are closed, you know.'

Scofield got in the front seat of the Mini, the black driver looking at him closely, courteously, his right hand out of sight. The man had obviously been given a photograph to study. Bray removed the Irish hat.

'Thank you,' said the driver, his hand moving swiftly.

Scofield took several deep breaths, trying to slow the rapid pounding of his chest. Twelve minutes. He dialled.

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'Don't you stay in London!' was the reply. 'Grosvenor Square has an alert out for you.'

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'Not the? . . . Bray, what in God's name are you talking about?'

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'Thank you, Roger.'

'Not at all. But don't expect me to have the two thousand quid. The banks are closed, you know.'

Scofield got in the front seat of the *Mimi*, the black driver looking at him closely, courteously, his right hand out of sight. The man had obviously been given a photograph to study. Bray removed the Irish hat.

'Thank you,' said the driver, his hand moving swiftly to his

jacket pocket, then to the wheel. The engine caught instantly and they sped up Tottenham Court Road. 'My name is Israel. You are Brandon Scofield - obviously. Good to make your acquaintance.'

'Israel?' he asked.

'That's it, man,' replied the driver, smiling, lending a pronounced West Indian lilt to his voice. 'I don't think my parents had in mind the cohesiveness of minorities when they gave it to me, but they were avid readers of the Bible. Israel Isles.'

'It's a nice name.'

'My wife thinks they blew it, as you Americans say. She keeps telling me that if they had only used Ishmael instead, all my introductions would be memorable.'

'My name is Ishmael' . . . Bray laughed. 'It's close enough.'

'This banter covers a slight nervousness on my part; if I may say so,' said Isles.

'Why?'

'We studied a number of your accomplishments in training; it wasn't that long ago. I'm chauffeuring a man we'd all like to emulate.'

The trace of laughter vanished from Scofield's face. 'That's flattering. I'm sure you will if you want to.' *And when you t to be my age, I hope you think it's been worth it.*

They drove south out of London on the Brighton road, branching west at Redhill and heading into the countryside. Israel Isles was sufficiently perceptive to curtail the banter. He apparently understood that he was driving either a very pre-occupied or exhausted American. Bray was grateful for the silence; he had to reach a difficult decision. The risks were enormous no matter what he decided.

Yet part of that decision had already been forced upon him, which meant he had to tell Symonds that Washington wasn't the immediate issue. He could not permit Roger to vent his misplaced outrage on the American Embassy; it was not the embassy that had placed the intercept on his telephone. It was the Matarese.

Yet to tell the whole truth meant involving Symonds, who would not remain silent. He would go to others and those others to their superiors. It was not the time to speak of conspiracy so massive and contradictory that it would be branded no more than the product of two terminated intelligence officers - both wanted for treason in their respective countries. The time would

discreet distance. Bray knew what was expected; he got out, as did the West Indian. The Bentley came to a stop. A white driver opened the rear door for a black companion. No one spoke as the exchange was made, both cars now driven by blacks.

'May I ask you a question?' said Israel Isles hesitantly.

'Sure.'

'I've gone through all the training, but I've never had to kill a man. I worry about that sometimes. What's it like?'

Scofield looked out the window at the shadows rushing past. *It's like walking through a door into a place you've never been before. I hope you do not have to go there, for it's filled with a thousand eyes - a few angry, more frightened, most pleading . . . all wondering. Why me now?* 'There's not very much of that,' said Bray. 'You never take a life unless it's absolutely necessary, knowing that if you have to, you're saving a lot more. That's the justification, the only one there should ever be. You put it out of your mind, lock it away behind a door somewhere in your head.'

'Yes, I think I understand. The justification is in the necessity. One has to accept that, doesn't one?'

'That's right. Necessity.' *Until you grow older and the door opens more and more frequently. Finally it will not close and you stand there, staring inside.*

They drove into the deserted parking area of a picnic site in the Guildford countryside. Beyond the post-and-rail fence were swings and slides and seesaws, all silhouetted in the bright moonlight.

A car was waiting for them, but Roger Symonds was not in it; he was expected momentarily. Two men had arrived early to make certain there was no one else in the picnic ground, no intercepts placed on phones considered sterile.

'Hello, Brandon,' said a short, stocky man in a bulky overcoat, extending his hand.

'Hi, how are you?' Scofield did not recall the agent's name, but remembered his face; he was one of the best men fielded by MI6. *Cons Op* had called him in - with British permission - when the Moscow-Paris-Cuba espionage ring was operating inside the Chamber of Deputies. Bray was impressed at seeing him now. Symonds was using a first team.

'It's been eight or ten years, hasn't it?'

'At least,' agreed Scofield. 'How've you been?'

'Still here. I'll be pensioned off before too long. Looking forward to that.'

'Enjoy it.'

The Englishman hesitated, then spoke with embarrassment. 'Never did see you after that awful business in East Berlin. Not that we were such friends, but you know what I mean. Delayed condolences, chap. Rotten thing. Fucking animals, I say.'

'Thanks. It was a long time ago.'

'Never that long,' said the MI6 man. 'It was my source in Moscow that brought us that garbage about you and the Serpent. Beowulf and the Serpent! My God, how could those pricks in D.C. swallow such rot?'

'It's complicated.'

He saw the headlights first, then heard the engine. A London taxi drove into the picnic ground. The driver, however, was no London cabbie; it was Roger Symonds.

The middle-aged MI6 officer climbed out and for a second or two blinked and stretched, as if to get his bearings. Roger had not changed during the years since he and Bray had known each

that masked a first-rate analytical mind. He was not an easy man to fool – with part of the truth or none of it.

'Bray, how are you?' said Symonds, hand held out. 'For God's sake, don't answer that, we'll get to it. Let me tell you, those are *not* easy cars to drive. I feel as though I've just limped through the worst rugger match in Liverpool. I'll be far more generous with cabbies in the future.' Roger looked around,

The Englishman listened in silence as Bray, sitting still on a swing, told his story of the massive shifting of funds. When Scofield had finished, Symonds walked behind him and shoved him between the shoulder blades.

'There's the push I promised you, although you don't deserve. You haven't been a good lad.'

'Why not?'

'You're not telling me what you should.'

'I see. You don't understand why I'm asking you not to use my name with Waverly?'

'Oh, no, that's perfectly all right. He has to deal with Washington every day. Granting an *unofficial* meeting with a retired American intelligence officer is not something he'd care to have on the Foreign Office's record. I mean, we don't actually defect to one another, you know. I'll take that responsibility, if it's to be taken.'

'Then what's bothering you?'

'The people after you. Not Grosvenor Square, of course, but the others. You haven't been candid; you said they were good but you didn't tell me *how* good. Or the depth of their resources.'

'What do you mean?'

'We pulled out your dossier and selected three names known to you, calling each, telling each that the man on the line was an intermediary from you, instructing each to go to a specific location. All three messages were intercepted; those called were followed.'

'Why does that surprise you? I told you as much.'

'What surprises me is that one of those names was known only to us. Not MI-Five, not Secret Service, not even the Admiralty. Only us.'

'Who was it?'

'Grimes.'

'Never heard of him,' said Bray.

'You only met him once. In Prague. Under the name of Brazuk.'

'KGB,' said Scofield, astonished. 'He defected in 'seventy-two. I gave him to you. He wouldn't have anything to do with us and there was no point in wasting him.'

'But only you knew that. You said nothing to your people and, frankly, we at Six took credit for the purchase.'

'You've got a leak, then.'

'Quite impossible,' replied Symonds. 'At least regarding the present circumstances as you've described them to me.'

'Why?'

'You say you ran across this global financial juggling act only a short while ago. Let's be generous and say several months, would you agree?'

'Yes.'

Symonds turned away. Neither spoke for several moments. Finally, the Englishman turned again, facing Bray. 'Such a simple phrase. "You know me." Do I?'

'I wouldn't have reached you if I didn't think you did. I don't ask strangers to risk their lives for me. I meant what I said before. Don't go home. You're marked . . . just as I'm marked. If you covered yourself, you'll be all right. If they find out you met with me, you're dead.'

'I am at this moment logged in at an emergency meeting at the Admiralty. Phone calls were placed to my office and my flat demanding my presence.'

'Good. I expected as much.'

'Goddamn you, Scofield! It was always your gift. You pull a man in until he can't stand it. Yes, I *do* know you, and I'll do as you ask - for a little while. But not because of your melodramatics; they don't impress me. Something else does, however. I said I could kill you for working with Taleniekov. I think I could, but I suspect you kill yourself a little every time you look at him. That's reason enough for me.'

... on the streets were jammed with traffic, the pavements teeming with customers anxious to part with pounds, Reichsmarks, yen, dollars and riyals. It was a concrete version of an ancient bazaar, anchored by the imposing monument that was Harrods.

Scofield stopped at a newsstand, shifted his attaché case to his left hand, picked up *The Times* and went in to a small restaurant. He slipped into a chair, satisfied that it provided a clear view of the entrance, more satisfied still that the pay telephone on the wall was only feet away. It was a quarter to ten; he was to call Roger Symonds at precisely 10.15 on the sterile number that could not be tapped.

He ordered breakfast from the laconic Cockney waitress and unfolded the newspaper. He found what he was looking for in a single column on the upper left section of the front page.

Verachten Heiress Dead

Essen. Odile Verachten, daughter of Walther, granddaughter of Ansel Verachten, founder of the Verachten Works, was found dead in her Werden Strasse ... apparent victim of ... family physician. Fe

assumed the managerial reins of the diversified companies under the guidance of her father, who has receded from active participation during the past years. Both parents were in seclusion at their estate in Stadtwald, and were not available for comment. A private family burial will take place within the residential grounds. A corporate statement is expected shortly, but none from Walther Verachten who is reported to be seriously ill.

Odile Verachten was a dramatically attractive addition to the boardrooms of this city of coldly efficient executives. She was mercurial, and when younger, given to displays of exhibitionism often at odds with the behaviour of Essen's business leaders. But no one doubted her ability to run the vast Verachten Works . . .

Scofield's eyes quickly scanned the biographical hyperbole that is an obituary editor's way of describing a spoiled, headstrong child who undoubtedly slept around with the frequency if not the efficacy of a Soho whore.

There was a follow-up story directly beneath. Bray began reading and knew instantly, instinctively, that another fragment of the elusive truth was being revealed.

Verachten Death Concerns Trans-Comm

New York, N. Y. In a move that took Wall Street by surprise, it was learned today that a team of management consultants from Trans-Communications, Incorporated, was flying to Essen, Germany for conferences with executives of the Verachten Works. The untimely death of Fräulein Odile Verachten, 47, and the virtual seclusion of her father, Walther, aged 76, has left the Verachten companies without an authoritative voice at the top. What astonished supposedly well-informed sources here was the extent of Trans-Comm's holdings in Verachten. In the legal labyrinths of Essen, American investments are often beyond scrutiny, but rarely when those holdings exceed twenty per cent. Rumours persist that Trans-Comm's are in excess of fifty per cent, although officials labelling such figures as ridiculous have been issued by the Boston headquarters of the conglomerate . . .

The words sprang up from the page at Scofield, the Boston headquarters . . .

Were two fragments of that elusive truth being revealed? Joshua Appleton IV was the senator from Massachusetts, the Appleton family the most powerful political entity in the state. They were the Episcopal Kennedys, far more restrained in self-evocation, but every bit as influential on the national scene - which was intrinsic to the international financial scene.

Would a retrospective of the Appleton's include connections - covert or otherwise - with Trans-Communications? It was something that would have to be learned.

The telephone on the wall behind him rang. It was eight minutes past ten; another seven and he would call Symonds at MI6 headquarters. He glanced at the phone, annoyed to see the waitress answer it. He stared at her lips. He hoped her conversation would not last long.

'Mister Hagate? Is there a Mister B. Hagate 'ere?' The question was shouted angrily by the irate waitress.

Bray froze. *B. Hagate 'ere?*

Agate, B.

Beowulf Agate.

Was Symonds playing some insane game of one-upmanship? Had the Englishman decided to prove the superior quality of British Intelligence's tracking techniques? Was the damn fool so egotistical he could not leave well enough alone?

- God, what a fool!

Scofield rose as unobtrusively as possible, holding his attaché case. He went to the phone and spoke.

'What is it?'

'Good morning, Beowulf Agate,' said a male voice with vowels so full and consonants so sharp they could have been formed at Oxford's Balliol College. 'We trust you've rested since your arduous journey from Rome.'

'Who's this?'

'My name's irrelevant; you don't know me. We merely wanted you to understand. We found you; we'll always be able to find you. But it's all so tedious. We feel that it would be far better for everyone concerned if we sat down and thrashed out the differences between us. You may discover they're not so great after all.'

'I don't feel comfortable with people who've L

'I must correct you. Some have tried to
tried to save you.'

'For what? A session of chemical therapy? To find out what I've learned, what I've done?'

'What you've learned is meaningless, and you can't do anything. If your own people take you, you know what you expect. There'll be no trial, no public hearing; you're far too dangerous to too many people. You've collaborated with the enemy, killed a young man your superiors believe was a fellow intelligence officer in Rock Creek Park, and fled the country. You're a traitor; you'll be executed at the first opportunity. Can you doubt it after the events on Nebraska Avenue? We can execute you the instant you walk out of that restaurant. Or before you leave.'

Bray looked around, studying the faces at the tables, looking for the inevitable pair of eyes, a glance behind a folded newspaper, or above the rim of a coffee cup. There were several candidates; he could not be sure. And without question, there were unseen killers in the crowds outside. He was trapped; his watch read eleven minutes past ten. Another four and he could dial Symonds on the sterile line. But he was dealing with professionals. If he hung up and dialled was there a man now at one of these tables - innocuously raising a fork to his mouth, sipping from a cup - who would pull out a weapon powerful enough to blow him into the wall? Or were those inside men with fixed guns, unwilling to make the sacrifice the Matarese demanded of its élite? He had to buy time and take the risk of changing the tables every second as he did so, preparing himself for that instant when escape came with sudden movement and the conceivable - unfortunate - sacrifice of innocent people.

'You want to meet, I want a guarantee I'll get out of here.'

'You've got it.'

'Your saying it isn't enough. Identify one of your employees in here.'

'Let's put it this way, Beowulf. We can hold you there, call the American Embassy, and within blinking time they'd have you cornered. Even should you get past them, we'd be waiting in the outer circle, as it were.'

His watch read twelve past ten. *Three minutes.*

'Then obviously you're not that anxious to meet with me. Scofield listened, his concentration total. He was almost certain the man on the line was a messenger; someone above wanted Beowulf Agate taken, not killed.

'I said we felt it would be better for everyone concerned . . .'

'Give me a facel' interrupted Bray. The voice was a messenger. 'Otherwise call the goddamned embassy. I'll take my chances. Now.'

'Very well,' came the reply, spoken rapidly. 'There's a man with rather sunken cheeks, wearing a grey overcoat . . .'

'I see him,' Bray did, five tables away.

'Leave the restaurant; he'll get up and follow you. He's your guarantee.'

Thirteen past ten. Two minutes

'What guarantee does he have? How do I know you won't take him out with me?'

'Oh, come now, Scofield . . .'

'I'm glad to hear you've got another name for me. What's your name?'

'I told you, it's irrelevant.'

'Nothing's irrelevant' Bray paused. 'I want to know your name.'

'Smith. Accept it'

Ten-fourteen. One minute. Time to start.

'I'll have to think about it. I also want to finish my breakfast.' Abruptly, he hung up the phone, shifted his attaché case to his right hand and walked over to the plain-looking man five tables away.

The man stiffened as Scofield approached, his hand reached under his overcoat.

'The alert's off,' said Scofield, touching the concealed hand under the cloth of the coat. 'I was told to tell you that; you're to take me out of here. But first, I'm to make a telephone call. He gave me the number, I hope I can remember it.'

The hollow-cheeked killer remained immobile, speechless. Scofield walked back to the telephone on the wall.

Ten-fourteen and fifty-one seconds Nine seconds to go. He frowned, as if trying to recall a number, picked up the phone, and dialled. Three seconds past 10.15 he heard the echoing sound that followed the interruption of the bell; the electronic devices were activated. He inserted his coin.

'We have to talk fast,' he said to Re — *Scanned with* found me. I've got a problem.'

'Where are you? We'll help.'

Scofield told him. 'Just send in two sire

do. Say it's an Irish incident, possible subjects inside. That's all I'll need.'

'I'm writing it down, they're on their way.'

'What about Waverly?'

'Tomorrow night. His house in Belgravia. I'm to escort you of course.'

'Not before then?'

'Before then? Good God, man, the only reason it's so soon is that I managed an open-end memorandum from the Admiralty. From that same mythical conference I was logged into last night.' Bray was about to speak, but Symonds rushed on. 'Incidentally, you were right. An inquiry was made to see if I was there.'

'Were you covered?'

'The caller was told the conference could not be interrupted, that I would be given the message when it was over.'

'Did you return the call?'

'Yes. From the Admiralty's cellars an hour and ten minutes after I left you. I woke up some poor chap in Kensington. An intercept, of course.'

'Then if you got back there, they saw you leave? You didn't use my name with Waverly, did you?'

'I used a name, not yours. Unless your talk is extremely fruitful, I expect I'll take a lot of stick for that.'

An obvious fact struck Bray. Roger Symonds' strategy had been successful. The Matarese had him trapped inside the Knightsbridge restaurant, yet Waverly had granted him a confidential interview thirty-six hours away. Therefore, no connection had been made between the interview in Belgravia and Beowulf Agate.

'Roger, what time tomorrow night?'

'Eightish. I'm to ring him first. I'll pick you up around seven. Have you any idea where you'll be?'

Scofield avoided the question. 'I'll call you at this number at four-thirty. Is that convenient?'

'So far as I know. If I'm not here, leave an address two blocks north of where you'll be. I'll find you.'

'You'll bring the photographs of all those following your decoys yesterday?'

'They should be on my desk by noon.'

'Good. And one last thing. Think up a very good, very official

reason why you can't bring me to Belgrave Square tomorrow night."

"What?"

"That's what you'll tell Waverly when you call him just before our meeting. It's an intelligence decision; you'll pick him up personally and drive back to MI-Six."

"MI-Six?"

"But you won't take him there; you'll bring him to the Connaught. I'll give you the room number at four-thirty. If you're not there, I'll leave a message. Subtract twenty-two from the number I give."

"See here, Brandon, you're asking too much!"

"You don't know that. I may be asking to save his life. And yours." In the distance, from somewhere outside, Bray could hear the piercing, two-note sound of a London siren; an instant later it was joined by a second. "Your help's arrived," said Scofield. "Thanks." He hung up and started back to the hollow-checked Matarese killer five tables away.

"Who were you talking to?" asked the man, his cold eyes nervous; his accent American. The sirens were drawing nearer; they were not lost on him.

"He didn't give me his name," replied Bray. "But he did give me instructions. We're to get out of here fast."

"Why?"

"Something happened. The police spotted a rifle in one of your cars; it's being held. There's been a lot of I.R.A. activity in the stores around here. Let's go!"

The man got out of his chair, nodding to his right. Across the crowded restaurant, Scofield saw a stern-faced, middle-aged woman get up, acknowledge the command by slipping the wide strap of a large purse over her shoulder, and start for the door of the restaurant.

Bray reached the cashier's cage, turning his movements, fumbling his money and his bill, watching the scene beyond the glass window. Two black police cars converged, screeching simultaneously to a stop at the kerb. A crowd of noisy, curious pedestrians gathered, then dispersed, curiosity replaced by fear as four helmeted London police jumped out of the vehicles and headed for the restaurant.

Bray judged the distance, then moved quickly. He reached the glass door and yanked it open several seconds before the police

had it blocked. The hollow-checked man and the middle-aged woman were at his heels, at the last moment side-stepping around him to avoid confronting the police.

Scotfield turned suddenly and lurched to his right, clutching his attaché case under his arm, grabbing his would-be escorts by the shoulders and pulling them down.

'These are the ones!' he shouted. 'Check them for guns! I heard them say they were going to bomb Scotch House!'

The police fell on the two Matarese, arms and hands and clubs thrashing the air. Bray dropped to his knees, releasing his double grip and dived to his left out of the way. He scrambled to his feet, raced through the crowds to the corner and ran into the street, threading his way between the traffic. He kept up the frantic race for three blocks, stopping briefly, under canopies and at shop windows to see if anyone followed him. None did, and two minutes later he slowed down and entered the enormous bronze-bordered portals of Harrods.

Once inside, he accelerated his pace as rapidly and as unobtrusively as possible, looking for a telephone. He had to reach Taleniev at the flat in the rue du Bac before the Russian left for Cap Gris. He *had* to, for once Taleniev reached England he would head for London and a small hotel in Knightsbridge. If the KGB man did that he would be taken by the Matarese.

'Through the chemist's towards the south doorway,' said an imperturbable clerk. 'There's a bank of phones against the wall.'

The late morning telephone traffic was light; the call went through without delay.

'I was leaving in a few minutes,' said Taleniev, his voice oddly hesitant.

'Thank Christ you didn't. What's the matter with you?'

'Nothing. Why?'

'You sound strange. Where's Antonia? Why didn't she answer the phone?'

'She stepped out to the grocer's. She'll be back shortly. If it sounded strange, it's because I don't like answering this telephone.' The Russian's voice was normal now, his explanation logical. 'What is the matter with *you*? Why this unscheduled call?'

'I'll tell you when you get here, but forget Knightsbridge.'

'Where will you be?'

Scofield was about to mention the Connaught, when Talenikov interrupted.

'On second thought, when I get to London I'll phone tower-central. You recall that exchange, don't you?'

Tower-central? Bray hadn't heard the name in years, but he remembered. It was a code name for a KGB drop on the Victoria Embankment, abandoned when Consular Operations discovered it some time back in the late 'sixties. The tourist boats that travelled up and down the Thames, that was it. 'I remember,' said Scofield, bewildered. 'I'll respond.'

'Then I'll be going . . .'

'Wait a minute,' interrupted Bray. 'Tell Antonia I'll call in a while.'

There was a brief silence before Talenikov replied. 'Actually, she said she might take in the Louvre, it's so close by. I can get to the Cap Gris district in an hour or so. There's nothing - I repeat - nothing to worry about.' There was a click and the line to Paris went dead. The Russian had hung up.

There's nothing - I repeat - nothing to worry about The words cracked with the explosive sounds of near-by thunder, his eyes blinded by bolts of lightning that carried the message into his brain. There was something to worry about and it concerned Antonia Gravel.

Actually, she said she might take in the Louvre . . . I can get to the Cap Gris district in an hour or so . . . Nothing to worry about.

Three disconnected statements, preceded by an interruption that prohibited disclosure of the contact point in London. Scofield tried to analyse the sequence; if there was meaning it was in the progression. The *Louvre* was only blocks away from *rue du Bac* - across the Seine, but near by. The *Cap Gris district* could not be reached in an hour or so, two and a half or three were more logical. *Nothing - I repeat - nothing to worry about;* then why the interruption? Why the necessity of a third contact point, avoiding any mention of the second.

Sequence. Progression. Further back?

I do not like answering this telephone Words spoken firmly, almost angrily. That was it. Suddenly Bray understood and the relief he felt was like cool water sprayed over a sweat-drenched body. Talenikov had seen something wrong - a face in the

street, a chance meeting with a former colleague, a car that remained too long on the rue du Bac – any number of unsettling incidents or observations. The Russian had decided to move Tom out of the Rive Gauche, across the river into another flat. She would be settled in an *hour or so* and he would not leave until she was; that was why there was nothing to worry about. Still, on the assumption that there could be a substance to a disturbing incident or observation, the KGB man had operated with extreme caution – always caution, it was their truest shield – and the telephone was an instrument of revelation. Nothing revealing was to be said.

Sequence, progression . . . meaning. Or was it? The Serpent had killed his wife. Was he finding comfort where none existed? The Russian had been the first to suggest eliminating the girl from the hills of Porto Vecchio – the love that had come into his life at the most inopportune time of his life. *Could he?* . . .

No! Things were different now! There was no Beowulf Agat to stretch to the breaking point, because that breaking point guaranteed the death of the Serpent, the end of the hunt for the Matarese. The best of professionals did not kill unnecessarily; the results were always geometric.

Still, he wondered, as he picked up the phone in Harrods' south entranceway, what was necessity but a man convinced of need? He put the question out of his mind; he had to find a sanctuary.

London's staid Connaught Hotel not only possessed one of the best kitchens in London but was an ideal choice for quick concealment, as long as one stayed out of the lobby and tested the kitchen from room service. Quite simply, it was impossible to get a room at the Connaught unless a reservation was made weeks in advance. The elegant hotel on Carlos Place was one of the last bastions of the Empire, catering in large measure to those who mourned its passing and had the wealth to do so gracefully. There were enough to keep it perpetually full; the Connaught rarely had an available room.

Scofield knew this, and years ago had decided that occasions might arise when the Connaught's particular exclusivity could be useful. He had reached and cultivated a director of the financial group that owned the hotel and made his appeal. As all theatres have 'house seats', and most restaurants keep constantly 're-

served' tables for those exalted patrons who have to be accommodated, so do hotels retain empty rooms for like purposes. Bray was convincing; his work was on the side of the angels, the Tory side. A room would be at his disposal whenever he needed it.

'Room six-twenty-six,' were the director's first words when Scofield placed his second, confirming call. 'Just go right up in the lift as usual. You can sign the registration in your room - as usual.'

Bray thanked his accomplice, and turned his thoughts to another problem, an irritating one. He could not return to the small hotel several blocks away, and the only clothes except those on his back were there. In a duffelbag on the unmade bed. There was nothing else of consequence; his money as well; several dozen useful letterheads, identification cards, passport and bank books, were all in his attaché case. But apart from the rumpled trousers, the cheap tweed jacket and the Irish hat, he didn't have a damn thing to wear. And clothes were not merely coverings for the body, they were intrinsic to the work and had to match the work; they were tools, consistently more effective than weapons and the spoken word. He left the bank of telephones and walked back into the aisles of Harrods. The selections would take an hour; that was fine. It would take his mind off Paris. And the inopportune love of his life.

It was shortly past midnight when Scofield left his room at the Connaught, dressed in a dark raincoat and a narrow-brimmed black hat. He took the service elevator to the basement of the hotel and emerged on the street through the employees' entrance. He found a taxi and told the driver to take him to Waterloo Bridge. He settled back in the seat and smoked a cigarette, trying to control his swelling sense of concern. He wondered if Taleniev understood the change that had taken place, a change so unreasonable, so illogical that he was not sure how he would react were he the Russian. The core of his excellence, his longevity in his work, had always been his ability to think as the enemy thought; he was incapable of doing so now.

I'm not your enemy!

Taleniev had shouted that unreasonable, illogical statement over the telephone in Washington. Perhaps - illogically - he was right. The Russian was no friend, but he was not *the*

enemy. That enemy was the Matarese.

And crazily, *so* unreasonably, through the Matarese he had found Antonia Gravet. The love . . .

What had *happened*?

He forced the question out of his mind. He would learn soon enough, and what he learned would no doubt bring back the relief he had felt at Harrods, diminished by too much time on his hands and too little to do. The telephone call to Roger Symonds, made precisely at 4.30, had been routine. Roger was out of the office so he had given information to the security room operator. The unexplained number that was to be relayed was six-four-three . . . minus twenty-two . . . Room 621, Connaught

The taxi swung out of Trafalgar Square, up the Strand, past Savoy Court, towards the entrance of Waterloo Bridge. Bray leaned forward; there was no point walking any farther than he had to. He would cut through side streets down to the Thames and the Victoria Embankment.

'This'll be fine,' he said to the driver, holding out payment, annoyed to see that his hand shook.

He went down the cobbled lane by the angling structure of dark stone that was the Savoy Hotel, and reached the bottom of the hill. Across the wide, well-lighted boulevard was the concrete walk and the high brick wall that fronted the river Thames. Moored permanently as a pub was a huge refurbished barge

Caledonia, closed by the 11.00 curfew imposed on all England's drinking halls, the few lights beyond the thick windows signifying the labours of clean-up crews removing the stains and odours of the day. A quarter of a mile south on the tree-lined Embankment were the sturdy, wide-beamed, full-decked river boats that ploughed the Thames most of the year round, ferrying tourists up to the Tower of London and back to Lambeth Bridge before returning to the waters of Cleopatra's Needle.

Years ago these boats were known as tower-central, drops for Soviet couriers and KGB agents making contact with informers and deep-cover espionage personnel. Consular Operations had uncovered the drop; in time, the Russians knew it. Tower-central was taken out; a known drop was eliminated for some other that would take months to find.

Scofield cut through the garden paths of the park behind the Savoy; music from the ballroom floated down from above.

He reached a small band amphitheatre with its rows of slatted

benches. A few couples were scattered around talking quietly. Bray looked for a single man for he was within the vicinity of tower-central. The Russian would be somewhere in the area.

He was not. Scofield walked out of the amphitheatre into the widest path that led to the boulevard. He emerged on the pavement; the traffic in the street was constant, bright headlights flashing by in both directions, mottled by the winter mists that rolled off the water. It occurred to Bray that Talenickov must have hired an automobile. He looked up and down the avenue to see if any were parked on either side; none was. Across the boulevard, in front of the Embankment wall, strollers walked casually in couples, threesomes and several larger groups; there was no man by himself. Scofield looked at his watch; it was five minutes to one. The Russian had said he might be as late as two or three o'clock in the morning. Bray swore at his impatience, at the anxiety in his chest whenever he thought about Paris. About Toni.

There was the sudden fire of a cigarette lighter, the flame steady, then extinguished, only to be relighted a second later. Diagonally across the wide avenue, to the right of the closed, chained gates of the pier that led to the tourist boats, a white-haired man was holding the flame under a blonde woman's cigarette; both leaned against the wall, looking at the water. Scofield studied the figure, what he could see of the face, and had to stop himself from breaking into a run. Talenickov had arrived.

Bray turned right and walked until he was parallel with the Russian and the blonde decoy. He knew Talenickov had seen him and wondered why the KGB man did not dismiss the woman, paying her whatever price they had agreed upon, and get her out of the way. It was foolish – conceivably dangerous – for a decoy to observe both parties at a contact point. Scofield waited at the kerb, seeing now that Talenickov's head was fully turned, the Russian staring at him, his arm around the woman's waist. Bray gestured first to his left then to his right. . . . clear. Get her out!

Talenickov did not
no time for whores;

Whores? The whore that never was? The *courier's whore*? Oh, my God!

Scofield stepped off the kerb; an automobile horn bellowed,

a car swerved towards the centre of the road to avoid hitting him. Bray barely heard the sound, was barely aware of the sight; he could only stare at the woman beside Taleniekov. The arm around the waist was no gesture of feigned affection, the Russian was holding her up. Taleniekov spoke in the woman's ear; she tried to spin around; her head fell back on her neck, her mouth open, a scream or a plea about to emerge, but nothing was heard.

The strained face was the face of his love. Under the blonde wig, it was *Toni*. All control left him; he raced across the wide avenue, speeding cars braking, spinning wheels, blowing horns. His thoughts converged like staccato shots of gunfire, one thought, one observation, more painful than all others. Antonia looked more dead than alive.

fuel tank; it should be taking effect on the road back to Ashford. 'Find a taxi.' Scofield's look conveyed the compliment he would not say.

'We have much to discuss,' added Taleniekov, moving away from the wall.

'Then hurry,' said Bray.

Antonia's breathing was steady, the muscles of her face relaxed in sleep. When she awoke she would be nauseous, but it would pass with the day. Scofield pulled the covers over her shoulders, leaned down and kissed her on her pale white lips, and got up from the bed.

He walked out of the bedroom, leaving the door ajar. Should Toni stir he wanted to hear her; hysterics were a by-product of scopolamine. They had to be controlled; it was why Taleniekov could not risk leaving her alone, even for the few minutes it would have taken to lease a car.

'What happened?' he asked the Russian, who sat in a chair, a glass of whisky in his hand.

'This morning - yesterday morning,' said Taleniekov, correcting himself, his white-haired head angled back against the rim of the chair, his eyes closed; the man was clearly exhausted. 'They say you're dead, did you know that?'

'Yes. What's that got to do with it?'

'It's how I got her back.' The Russian opened his eyes and looked at Bray. 'There's very little about Beowulf Agate I don't know.'

'And?'

'I said I was you. There were several basic questions to answer; they were not difficult. I offered myself in exchange for her. They agreed.'

'Start from the beginning.'

'I wish I could, I wish I knew what it was. The Matarese, or someone within the Matarese, wants you alive. It's why certain people were told that you are not. They don't look for the American, only the Russian. I wish I understood.' Taleniekov drank.

'What happened?'

'They found her. Don't ask me how, I don't know. Perhaps Helsinki, perhaps you were picked up in Rome, perhaps anything or anyone, I don't know.'

'But they found her,' said Scofield, sitting down. 'Then what?'

'Early yesterday morning, four or five hours before you called, she went down to a bakery; it was only a few doors away. An hour later she had not returned. I knew then I had two choices. I could go out after her - but where to start, where to look? Or I could wait for someone to come to the flat. You see, *they* had no choice, I knew that. The telephone rang a number of times but I did not answer, knowing that each time I did not, it brought

more testing moments of my life not to kill them both, especially one. He had that small, ugly little mark on his chest. When I ripped his clothes off and saw it, I went nearly mad.'

'Why?'

'They killed in Leningrad - in Essen. Later you'll understand. It's part of what we must discuss.'

'Go on,' Seaford said to me.

I thought the sky over Paris had fallen, so hysterical was the caller. 'An impostor in London!' he squeaked. Something about a 'gross error having been made by the embassy, the information they received completely erroneous'.

'I think you skipped something,' interrupted Bray again. 'I assume that was when you said you were me.'

'Let's say I answered in the affirmative when the hysterical

Matarsce were told I was dead. Only certain people inside the

nothing, we told him the problem was solved. For such people you're no longer alive, no longer hunted.'

'But why? I *am* hunted. They trapped me.' Bray sat down revolving the glass in his hand.

'One question with two answers, I think,' said the Russian. 'Like any diverse organization, the Matarese is imperfect. Among its ranks are the undisciplined, the violence-prone, men who fight for the score alone or because of fanatic beliefs. These were people who were told you were dead. If they did not hunt, you they would not kill you.'

'That's your first answer; what's the second? Why do someone want to keep me alive?'

'To make you a *consigliere* of the Matarese.'

'What?'

'Think about it. Consider what you'd bring to such an organization.'

Bray stared at the KGB man. 'No more than you would.'

'Oh, much more. There are no great shocks to come out of Moscow, I accept that. But there are astonishing revelations to be found in Washington. You could provide them; you'd be a enormous asset. The sanctimonious are always far more vulnerable.'

'I accept that.'

'Before Odile Verachten was killed, she made an offer to me. It was not an offer she was entitled to make; they don't want that. They want you. If they can't have you, they'll kill you. It's someone's giving you the option.'

It would be far better for all concerned if we sat down and thrashed out the differences between us. You may discover they're not so great after all. Words from a faceless messenger.

'Let's get back to Paris,' said Bray. 'How did you get her?'

'It wasn't so difficult. The man on the phone was too anxious; he saw a generalship in his future, or his own execution. I discussed what might happen to the soldier with the ugly little mark on his chest; the fact that I knew about it was nearly enough in itself. I set up a series of moves, offering the soldier and Beowulf Agate for the girl. Beowulf was tired of running and was perfectly willing to listen to whatever anyone had to say. He - I - knew I was cornered, but professionalism demanded that he - you - extract certain guarantees. The girl had to go free. Were my reactions consistent with your well-known obstinacy?'

'Very plausible,' replied Scofield. 'Let's see if I can fill in a few spaces. You answered the questions: What was my mother's middle name? Or when did my father change jobs?'

'Nothing so ordinary,' broke in the Russian. 'Who was your fourth kill? Where?'

'Lisbon,' said Bray quietly. 'An American beyond salvage. Yes, you'd know that . . . Then your moves were made by a sequence of telephone calls to the flat - my call from London was the intrusion - and with each call you gave new instructions, any deviation and the exchange was cancelled. The exchange ground itself was in traffic, preferably one-way traffic, with one vehicle, one man and Antonia. Everything to take place within a time span of sixty to a hundred seconds.'

The Russian nodded. 'Noon on the Champs Élysées, south of the Arch. Vehicle and girl taken, ~~man and~~ soldier bound at the elbows, thrown out at the intersection of the Place de la Concorde, and a swift, if roundabout, drive out of Paris.'

Bray put the whisky down and walked to the hotel window overlooking Carlos Place. 'A little while ago you said you had two choices. To go out after her, or wait in the rue du Bac. It seems to me there was a third but you didn't take it. You could have got out of Paris yourself right away.'

Talenickov closed his eyes. 'That was the one choice I didn't have. It was in her voice, in every reference she made to you. I thought I saw it in Corsica, that first night in the cave above Porto Vecchio when you looked at her. I thought then, how insane, how perfectly . . . ' The Russian shook his head.

'Unreasonable?' asked Bray.

Talenickov opened his eyes. 'Yes. It is necessary, the remainder is as clean . . . *now and then*, there'll be no more cleansing.'

'None will be asked for. Or expected.'

'Good. I presume you've seen the newspapers.'

'Trans-Communications? Its holdings in Verachten?'

'Ownership would be more like it. I trust you noted the location of the corporate headquarters. Boston, Massachusetts. A city quite familiar to you, I think.'

'What's more to the point, it's the city - and then . . . '

see what – if any – his connections are to Trans-Comm.'

'Can you doubt they exist?'

'At this point I doubt everything,' said Scofield. 'Maybe I'll think differently after we've put together those facts you say we now have. Let's start with when we left Corsica.'

Taleniekov nodded. 'Rome came first. Tell me about Scozzi.'

Bray did, taking the time to explain the role Antonia had been forced to play in the Red Brigades.

'That's why she was in Corsica, then?' asked Vasili. 'Running from the Brigades?'

'Yes. Everything she told me about their financing spells Matarese . . .' Scofield clarified his theories, moving swiftly on to the events at Villa d'Este and the murder of Guillermo Scozzi, ordered by a man named Paravicini. 'It was the first time I heard that I was dead. They thought I was you . . . Now Leningrad. What happened there?'

Taleniekov breathed deeply, silently, before answering. 'They killed in Leningrad, in Essen,' he said, his voice barely audible. 'Oh, how they kill, these twentieth-century *fida'is*, these contemporary mutants of Hasan ibn as-Sabbāh! I should tell you, the soldier I pushed from the car in the Place de la Concorde had more than a blemish on his chest. His clothes were stained by a gunshot that left another mark. I told his associate it was for Leningrad, for Essen.'

The Russian told his story quietly, the depth of his feelings parent when he spoke of Lodzia Kronescha, the scholar ikovsky and Heinrich Kassel. Especially Lodzia; it was necessary for him to stop for a while and replenish the whisky in his glass. Scofield remained silent; there was nothing he could say. The Russian finished with the field at night in Stadtwald and the death of Odile Verachten.

'Prince Andrei Voroshin became Ansel Verachten, founder of the Verachten Works, next to Krupp the largest company in Germany, now one of the most sprawling in all Europe. The granddaughter was his chosen successor in the Matarese.'

'And Scozzi,' said Bray, 'joined Paravicini through a marriage of convenience. Blood-lines, a certain talent, and charm in exchange for a seat in the board room. But the chair was a prop; it's all it ever was. The count was expendable, killed because he made a mistake.'

'As was Odile Verachten. Also expendable.'

'And the name Scozzi-Paravicini is misleading. The control lies with Paravicini.'

have?

'What we suspected, what old Krupsky told you in Moscow. The Matarese was taken over, obviously in part, possibly in whole. Scozzi and Voroshin were useful for what they brought or what they knew or what they owned. They were tolerated - even made to feel important - as long as they were useful, eliminated the moment they were not.'

'But useful for what? That's the question!' Talenickov banged his glass down in frustration. 'What does the Matarese want? They finance intimidation, and murder through huge corporate structures; they spread chaos, but *why*? This world is going mad with terror, bought and paid for by men who lose the most by it. Their investment is in total *disorder*! It makes no sense!'

Scofield heard the sound - the moan - and sprang out of the chair. He walked quickly to the bedroom door; Toni had changed her position, twisting to her left, the covers bunched around her shoulders. But she was still asleep; the cry had come from her unconscious. He went back to the chair and stood behind it.

'Total disorder,' he said softly. 'Chaos. The clashing of bodies in space. Creation.'

'What are you talking about?' asked Talenickov.

'I'm not sure,' replied Scofield. 'I keep going back to the word "chaos" but I'm not sure why.'

'We're not sure of *anything*. We have four names - but two didn't amount to much - and they're dead. We see an alignment of companies who are the superstructure - the *essential superstructure* - behind terrorism everywhere, but we cannot prove the alignment and don't know why they're sponsoring it. Scozzi-Paravicini finances the Red Brigades, Verachten no doubt

changes we revelled against such conglomerates would be called the ravings of madmen, or worse.'

'Much worse,' said Bray, remembering the voice over the restaurant's telephone. 'Traitors. We'd be shot.'

'Your words have the ring of prophecy. I don't like them.'

'Neither do I, but I like being executed less.'

'A profound statement. Also a *non sequitur*.'

'Not when coupled with what you just said. "We've found the Matarese, but still we don't see them", wasn't that it?'

'Yes.'

'Suppose we not only found one, but had him. In our hands.'

'A *hostage*?'

'That's right.'

'That's insane.'

'Why? You had the Verachten woman.'

'In a car. In a farmer's field. At night. I had no delusions of taking her into Essen and setting up a base of operations.'

Scofield sat down. 'The Red Brigades held Aldo Moro eight blocks away from a police headquarters in Rome. Although that's not exactly what I had in mind.'

Taleniekov leaned forward. 'Waverly?'

'Yes.'

'How? The American network is after you, the Matarese nearly trapped you; what did *you* have in mind? Dropping into the Foreign Office and proffering an invitation for tea?'

'Waverly's to be brought here - to this room - at eight o'clock tonight.'

The Russian whistled. 'May I ask how you managed it?'

Bray told him about MI6's Roger Symonds. 'He's doing it because he thinks whatever convinced me to work with you must be strong enough to get me an interview with Waverly.'

'They have a name for me. Did he tell you?'

'Yes. The Serpent.'

'I suppose I should be flattered, but I'm not. I find it ugly. Does Symonds have any idea that this meeting has a hostile basis? That you suspect Waverly of being something more than England's Foreign Secretary?'

'No; the reverse, in fact. When he objected, the last thing I said to him was that I might be trying to save Waverly's life.'

'Very good,' said Taleniekov. 'Very frightening. Assassination, like acts of terror, is a spreading commodity. They'll be alone when?'

'Yes, I made a point of it. A room at the Connaught; there'd be no reason for Roger to think anything's wrong. And we know the Matarese haven't made the connection between me and the

man Waverly is supposedly meeting at the MI-Six offices.'

'You're certain of that? It strikes me as the weakest part of the strategy. They've got you in London, they know you have the four names from Corsica. Suddenly, from nowhere, Waverly, the *consigliere*, is asked to meet secretly with a man at the office of a British intelligence agent known to have been a friend of Beowulf Agate. The equation seems obvious to me; why should it elude the Matarese?'

'A very specific reason. They don't think I ever made contact with Symonds.'

'They can't be sure you didn't.'

'The odds are against it. Roger's an experienced field man; he covered himself. He was logged in at the Admiralty and later returned a blind inquiry. I wasn't picked up in the streets and we used a sterile phone. We met an hour outside of London, two changes of vehicle for me, at least four for him. No one followed.'

'Impressive. Not conclusive.'

'It's the best I can do. Except for a final qualification.'

'Qualification?'

'Yes. There isn't going to be a meeting tonight. They'll never reach this room.'

'No meeting? Then what's the purpose of their coming here?'

'So we can grab Waverly downstairs before Symonds knows what's happened. Roger'll be driving; when he gets here, he won't go through the lobby, he'll use a side entrance, I'll find out which one. In the event - and I agree it's possible - that Waverly is followed, you'll be down in the street. You'll see the

'That's right. I'm counting on it. I can take Roger by surprise, knock him out and force a pill down his throat. He won't wake up for hours.'

'It's not enough,' said Talemekov, lowering his voice. 'You'll have to kill him. Sacrifices inevitably must be made. Churchill understood that with Coventry and the Ultra; this is no less, Scofield. British Intelligence will mount the most extensive man-hunt in England's history. We've got to get Waverly out of the country. If the death of one man can buy us time - a day perhaps - I submit it's worth it.'

Bray looked at the Russian, studying him. 'You submit too goddamn much.'

'You know I'm right.'

Silence. Suddenly Scofield hurled his glass across the room. It shattered against the wall. 'Goddamn it!'

Taleniekov bolted forward, his right hand under his coat. 'What is it?'

'You're right and I *do* know it. He trusts me and I've got to kill him. It'll be days before the British will know where to start. Neither MI-Six nor the Foreign Office know anything about the Connaught.'

The KGB man removed his hand, sliding it on to the arm of the chair. 'We need the time, Scofield. I don't think there's any other way.'

'If there is, I hope to God it comes to me.' Bray shook his head. 'I'm sick to death of necessity.' He looked over at the bedroom door. 'But then she told me that.'

'The rest is detail,' continued Taleniekov, rushing the moment. 'I'll have an automobile on the street outside the entrances. The moment I'm finished - if, indeed, there's anything for me to do - I'll come inside and help you. It will be necessary, of course, to take the dead man along with Waverly. Remove him.'

'The dead man has no name,' said Scofield quietly. He got out of the chair and walked to the window. 'Has it occurred to you that the closer we get, the more like them we become?'

'What occurs to me,' said the Russian, 'is that your strategy is nothing short of extraordinary. Not only will we have a *consigliere* of the Matarese, but *what a consigliere!* The Foreign Secretary of England! Have you any idea what that means? We'll break that man wide open, and the world will listen. It will be *forced* to listen!' Taleniekov paused, then added softly, 'What you've done lives up to the stories of Beowulf Agate.'

'Bullshit,' said Bray. 'I hate that name.'

The moan was sudden, bursting into a prolonged sob, followed by a cry of pain, muffled, uncertain, desperate. Scofield raced into the bedroom. Toni was writhing on the bed, her hands clawing her face, her legs kicking viciously at imaginary demons that surrounded her. Bray sat down and pulled her hands from her face, gently, firmly, bending each finger so that the nails would not puncture her skin. He pinned her arms and held her, cradling her as he had cradled her in Rome. Her cries subsided, replaced once more by sobs; she shivered, her breathing erratic, slowly returning to normal as her rigid body went limp. The first hysterics

bared like a young animal's caught in a snare that was breaking its back. A heartbreaking whimper came from deep inside her.

She collapsed in his arms.

Tomorrow, my love, my only love. Tomorrow comes with the sunlight, everyone knows that. And then the pain will pass, I promise you. And I promise you something else, my inopportune love so late in my life. Tomorrow, today, tonight . . . I will take the man who will bring this nightmare to a close. Taleniekov is right. We will break him – as no man has ever been broken – and the world will listen to us. When it does, my love, my only adorable love, you and I are free. We will go far away where the night brings sleep and love, not death, not fear and loathing of the darkness. We will be free because Beowulf Agate will be gone. He will disappear – for he hasn't done much good. But he has one more thing to do. Tonight.

Scofield touched Antonia's cheek. She held his hand briefly, moving it to her lips, smiling, reassuring him with her eyes.

'How's the head?' asked Bray.

'The ache is barely a numbness now,' she said. 'I'm fine, really.'

Scofield released her hand and walked across the room where Taleniekov was bent over a table, studying a road map. Without having discussed it, both men were dressed nearly alike for their work. Sweaters and trousers of dark material, tightly strapped shoulder holsters with black leather belts laterally across the chest. Their shoes were also dark in colour, but light in weight, with thick rubber soles that had been scraped with knives until the soles were coarse.

Neither man had spoken with the other about the topic of clothing; it would have been foolish. The only subsequent remark was made by Vasili when he arrived at the hotel room and was about to remove his loose-fitting topcoat.

'I must commend your tailor,' he had observed.

Taleniekov now glanced up as Bray approached the table. 'After Great Dunmow, we'll head east towards Coggeshall on our way to Nayland. Incidentally, there's an airfield capable of handling small jets south of Hadleigh. Such a field might be of value to us in a few days.'

'You may be right.'

'Also,' added the KGB man with obvious reluctance, 'this route passes the Blackwater River; the forests are dense in that area. It

would be a . . . good place to drop off the package.'

'The dead man still hasn't got a name,' said Scofield. 'Give him his due. He's Roger Symonds, honourable man, and I hate this tucking world.'

'At the risk of appearing fatuous, may I submit - forgive me, suggest - that what you do tonight will benefit that sad world we both have abused too well for too long.'

'I'd just as soon you didn't submit or suggest anything.' Bray looked at his watch. 'He'll be calling soon. When he does, Toni will go down to the lobby and pay Mr Edmonton's bill - that's me. She'll come back up with a steward and take our bags and briefcase down to the car we've rented in Edmonton's name and drive directly to Colchester. She'll wait at a restaurant called Bonner's until 11.30. If there are any changes of plans or we need her, we'll reach her there. If she doesn't have from . . . shall . . .

The telephone rang; all three looked at it - a moment suspended in time for the bell meant the time had come. Bray walked over to the desk, let the phone ring a second time, then picked it up.

Whatever words he might have expected, whatever greetings, information, instructions or revelations that might have come, nothing on this earth could have prepared him for what he heard. Symonds' voice was a cry from some inner space of torment, a pain of such extreme that it was beyond belief.

'They're all dead. It's a massacre! Waverly, his wife, children, three servants . . . dead. What in hell have you done?'

'Oh, my God!' Scofield's mind raced. thoughts swept . . .
tated into . . .

Bray shook his head. 'We'll get it later.' He took his hand from the mouthpiece; Symonds was talking rapidly, close to hysterics.

'It's horrible. Oh, God, the most terrible thing! They've been slaughtered . . . like animals!'

'Roger! Get hold of yourself! Now listen to me. It's part of pattern. Waverly knew about it. He knew too much; it's why he was killed. I couldn't reach him in time.'

'You couldn't? . . . For the love of God . . . why *didn't* you couldn't you . . . tell me? He was the Foreign Secretary, England's *Foreign Secretary*! Have you any idea the repercussions, the . . . oh, my God, a tragedy! A *catastrophe!* *Butchered!*' Symonds paused. When he spoke again it was obvious that the professional in him was struggling for control. 'I want you down in my office as soon as you can get there. Consider yourself under detention by the British government.'

'I can't do that. Don't ask me.'

'I'm not asking, Scofield! I'm giving you a direct order backed up by the highest authorities in England. You will *not* leave that hotel! By the time you reached the lift, all the current would be shut off, every staircase, every exit under armed guard.'

'All right, all right. I'll get to MI-Six,' lied Bray.

'You'll be *escorted*. Remain in your room.'

'Forget the room, Roger,' said Scofield, grasping for whatever words he could find that might fit the crisis. 'I've got to see you but not at MI-Six.'

'I don't think you *heard* me!'

'Put guards on the doors, shut off the goddamned elevators, do anything you like, but I've got to see you *here*. I'm going to get out of this room and go down to the bar, to the darkest . . . I can find. Meet me there.'

'I repeat . . .'

'Repeat all you want to, but if you don't come over here and listen to me, there'll be other assassinations - *that's* what they are, Roger! *Assassinations*. And they won't stop at a Foreign Secretary, or a Secretary of State . . . or a President or a Prime Minister.'

'Oh, my . . . God!' whispered Symonds.

'It's what I couldn't tell you last night. It's the reason you looked for when we talked. But I won't put it on-record, I can't work in-sanction. And that should tell you enough. Get over here, Roger.' Bray closed his eyes, held his breath; it was now or it was not.

'I'll be there in ten minutes,' said Symonds, his voice cracking.

Scofield hung up the phone, looking first at Antonia, then Taleniekov. 'He's on his way.'

'He'll take you in!' exclaimed the Russian.

'I don't think so. He knows me well enough to know I won't go on-record if I say I won't. And he doesn't want the rest of it on his head.' Bray crossed to the chair where he had thrown his raincoat and travel bag. 'I'm sure of one thing. He'll meet me downstairs, and give me a chance. If he accepts, I'll be back in an hour. If he doesn't . . . I'll kill him.' Scofield unzipped his bag, reached into it and pulled out a sheathed, long-bladed hunting knife. It still had the Harrods' price tag on it. He looked at Toni; her eyes told him she understood. Both the necessity and his loathing of it.

Symonds sat across from Bray in the booth of the Connaught lounge. The subdued lighting could not conceal the pallor of the Englishman's face; he was a man forced to make decisions of such magnitude that the mere thought of them made him ill. Physically ill, mentally exhausted.

They had talked for nearly forty minutes. Scofield, as planned, had told him part of the truth – a great deal more of it than he cared to – but it was necessary. He was now about to make his final request of Roger, and both men knew it. Symonds felt the terrible weight of his decision; it was in his eyes. Bray felt the knife in his belt; his appalling decision to use it if necessary made it difficult for him to breathe.

'We don't know how extensive it is, or how many people in the various governments are involved, but we know it's being

Yurevich in Russia. We're closing in; we have names, covert alliances, knowledge that intelligence branches in Washington, Moscow and Bonn have been manipulated. But we have no proof; we'll get it, but we don't have it now. If you take me in, we'll never get it. The case against me is beyond salvage; I don't have to tell you what that means. I'll be executed at the first . . . opportune moment. For the wrong reason, by the wrong people, but the result will be the same. Give me time, Roger.'

'What will you give me?'

'What more do I have to give you?'

they'll either go father underground, cutting off all traces, or killing, the terrorism, will accelerate. There'll be a series of bloodbaths . . . and you'll be dead.'

'That's my condition. The names, the alliances. Or you won't leave here.'

Bray stared at the man from MI6. 'Will you stop me, Roger? mean here, now, at this moment, will you? *Can* you?'

'Perhaps not. But those two men over there will.' Symonds nodded to his left.

Scofield shifted his eyes. Across the room, at a table in the centre of the lounge, were two British agents, one of them the red-haired stocky man he had spoken with last night at the moonlit playground in Guildford. That same man now stared at him, no sympathy, only hostility in his look. 'You cover yourself,' said Scofield.

'Did you think I wouldn't? They're armed and have the instructions. The names, please.' Symonds took out a notebook and a ballpoint pen; he placed them in front of Bray. 'Don't write nonsense, I beg you. Be practical. If you and the Russians are killed, there's no one else. I may not be in a class with Beowulf Agate and the Serpent, but I'm not without certain talents.'

'How much time will you give me.'

'One week. Not a day more.'

Scofield picked up the pen, opened the small notebook and began to write.

4 April 1911
Porto Vecchio, Corsica
Scozzi
Voroshin
Waverly
Appleton

Current:
Guillamo Scozzi - Dead
Odile Verachten - Dead
John Waverly - Dead
Joshua Appleton - ?

Scozzi-Paravicini. Milan
Verachten Works. (Voroshin.) Essen
Trans-Communications. Boston.

Below the names and the companies, he then wrote one word:

Matarese

Bray walked out of the elevator, his mind on air routes, accessibilities and cover. Hours now took on the significance of days; there was so much to learn, so much to find, and so little time to do it all.

They had thought it might end in London with the breaking of David Waverly, consigliere of the Matarese, Foreign Secretary of the United Kingdom. They should have known better; the descendants were expendable.

Three were dead, three names removed from the guest list of Guillaume de Matarese for the date of 4 April 1911. Yet one was left. The golden politician of Boston, the man few doubted would win the summer primaries and without question the election in the fall. He would be President of the United States. Joshua Appleton IV seemed truly to be contemporary America's man-for-all-seasons. Many had cried out during the tragic, violent 'sixties and 'seventies that they could bind the country together; Appleton was never so presumptuous as to make the statement, but most of America thought he was perhaps the only man who could.

But bind it for what? For whom? That was the most frightening prospect of all. Was he the one descendant not expendable? Chosen by the council, by the shepherd boy, to do what the others could not do?

They would reach Appleton, thought Bray as he rounded the corner of the Connaught hallway towards his room, but not where Appleton expected to be reached - if he expected to be reached. They would not be drawn to Washington, where chance encounters with State, FBI and Company personnel were ten times greater than any other place in the hemisphere. There was no point in taking on two enemies simultaneously. Instead, they would go to Boston, to the conglomerate so aptly named Trans-Communications.

Somewhere, somehow within the upper ranks of that vast company, they would find one man - one man with a blue circle on his chest or connections to Milan's Scozzi-Paravicini or Essen's Verachten, and that man would whisper an alarm sounding Joshua Appleton IV. They would trap him, take him in Boston. And when they were finished with him the secret of the

Matarese would be exposed, told by a man whose impeccable credentials were matched only by his incredible deceit. It *had* to be Appleton; there was no one else. If they . . .

Scofield reached for the weapon in his holster. The door of his room twenty feet down the corridor was open. There were no circumstances imaginable that allowed it to be *conceivably* left open by choice! There had been an intruder – intruders.

He stopped, shook the paralysis from his mind, and ran to the side of the door, pivoting, pressing his back into the wall by the moulding. He lunged inside, crouching, levelling his gun in front of him, prepared to fire.

There was no one, no one at all. Nothing but silence and a very neat room. Too neat; the road map had been removed from the table, the glasses washed, returned to the silver tray on the bureau, the ashtrays wiped clean. There was no evidence that the room had been occupied. Then he saw it – them – and the paralysis returned.

On the floor by the table were his attaché case and travel bag positioned – neatly – beside each other, the way a steward or a bellboy might position them. And folded – neatly – over the travel bag was his dark-blue raincoat. A guest was prepared for departure.

Two visitors had already departed. Antonia was gone, Talenievskov was gone.

The bedroom door was open, the bed fully made up, the bedside table devoid of the water pitcher and the ashtray which an hour ago had been filled with half-smoked cigarettes – testimony to an anxious, pain-stricken night and day.

Silence. Nothing.

His eyes were suddenly drawn to the one thing – again on the floor – that was not in keeping with the neatness of the room, and he felt sick. On the rug by the left side of the table was a circle of blood – a jagged circle, still moist, still glistening. And then he looked up. A small pane of glass had been blown out of the window.

‘*Toni!*’ The scream was his; it broke the silence, but he could not help himself. He could not think, he could not move.

The glass shattered; a second window pane blew out of its wooden frame and he heard the spinning whine of a bullet as it embedded itself in the wall behind him. He dropped to the floor.

The telephone rang, its jangling, erratic bell somehow proof of

insanity! He crawled to the desk below the sightline of the window.

'*Toni? . . . Toni!*' He was screaming, crying, yet he had not reached the desk, had not touched the phone.

He raised his hand and pulled the instrument to the floor beside him. He picked up the receiver and held it to his ear.

'We can always find you, Beowulf,' said the precise English voice on the other end of the line. 'I told you that when we spoke before.'

'What have you *done with her!*?' shouted Bray. 'Where is *she*?'

'Yes, we thought that might be your reaction. Rather strange coming from you, isn't it? You don't even inquire about the Serpent.'

'Stop it! Tell me!'

'I intend to. Incidentally, you had a grave lapse of judgement - again strange for one so experienced. We merely had to follow your friend Symonds from Belgravia. A quick perusal of the hotel registry - as well as the time and the method of registering - gave us your room.'

'What have you *done with her?* . . . *Them?*'

'The Russian's wounded, but he may survive. At least sufficiently enough for our purposes.'

'The girl!'

'She's on her way to an airfield, as is the Serpent.'

'Where are you taking her?'

'We think you know. It was the last thing you wrote down before you named the Corsican. A city in the state of Massachusetts.'

'Oh, God . . . Symonds?'

'Dead, Beowulf. We have the notebook. It was in his car. For all intents and purposes, Roger Symonds, MI-Six, has disappeared. In view of his schedule, he may even be tied in with the terrorists who massacred the Foreign Secretary of England and his family.'

'You . . . bastards.'

'No Morale . . .'

'Who?'

'Don't be a fool,' said the faceless mes-

'In Boston?'

He reached the coast of France, the same way he had left it four days ago; by motor launch at night. The trip to Paris took longer than anticipated; the drone he had expected to use wanted no part of him. The word was out, the price for his dead body too high, the punishment for helping Beowulf Agate too severe. The man owed Bray; he preferred to walk away.

Scofield found an off-duty *gendarme* in a bar in Boulogne-sur-mer; the negotiations were swift. He needed a fast ride to Paris, to Orly Airport. To the *gendarme*, the payment was staggering; Bray reached Orly by daybreak. By 9.00, a Mr Edmonton was on the first Air Canada flight to Montreal. The plane left the ground and he turned his thoughts to Antonia.

They would use her to trap him, but there was no way they would permit her to stay alive once the trap had closed. Any more than they would let Taleniekov live once they had learned everything he knew. Even the Serpent could not withstand injections of scopolamine or sodium amytal; no man could block his memory or prohibit the flow of information once the gates of recall were chemically pried open.

These were the things he had to accept, and having accepted them, base his every move on their reality. He would not grow old with Antonia Gravet; there would be no years of peace. Once he understood this, there was nothing left but to try to reverse the conclusion, knowing that the chances of doing so were remote. Simply put, since there was absolutely nothing to

lose, conversely there was no risk not worth taking, no strategy too outlandish or outrageous to consider.

The key was Joshua Appleton; that remained constant. Was it possible that the senator was such a consummate actor that he had been able to deceive so many so well for so long? Apparently it was so; one trained from birth to achieve a single goal, with unlimited money and talent available to him, could possibly conceal anything. But the gap that Scofield needed filling was found in the stories of Josh Appleton, Marine combat officer, Korea. They were well known, publicized by campaign managers, emphasized by the candidate's reluctance to discuss them, other than to praise the men who had served with him.

Captain Joshua Appleton had been decorated for bravery under fire on five separate occasions, but the medals were only symbols, the tributes of his men paeans of genuine devotion. Josh Appleton was an officer dedicated to the proposition that no soldier should take a risk he would not take himself; and no infantryman, regardless of how badly he was wounded or how seemingly hopeless the situation, was to be left to the enemy if there was any chance at all to get him back. With such tenets, he was not always the best of officers, but he was the best of men. He continuously exposed himself to the severest punishment to save a private's life, or draw fire away from a corporal's squad. He had been wounded twice dragging men out of the hills of Panmunjom, and nearly lost his life at Ch'osari when he had crawled through enemy lines to direct a helicopter.

After the war, and he was home, Appleton had faced another struggle as dangerous as any he had experienced in Korea. A near fatal accident on the Massachusetts Turnpike. His car had swerved over the divider, crashing into an onrushing truck, the injuries sustained from head to legs so punishing the doctors at Massachusetts General had about given him up for dead. When the bulletins were issued about this decorated son of a prominent family, men came from all over the country. Mechanics, bus drivers, farmhands and clerks; the soldiers who had served under 'Captain Josh'.

For two days and nights they had kept vigil, the more demonstrative praying openly, others simply sitting with their thoughts or reminiscing quietly with their former comrades. And when the crisis had passed and Appleton was taken off the critical

list, these quiet men went home. They had come because they had wanted to come; they had left not knowing whether they had made any difference, but hoping that they had. Captain Joshua Appleton IV, USMCR, was deserving of that hope.

This was the gap that Bray could neither fill nor understand. The captain who had risked his life so frequently, so openly for the sake of other men; how could those risks be reconciled with a man programmed since birth to become the President of the United States? How could repeated exposures to death be justified to the Matarese?

Somehow they had been, for there was no longer any doubt where Senator Joshua Appleton stood. The man who would be elected President of the United States before the year was over was inextricably tied to a conspiracy as dangerous as any in American history.

At Orly, Scofield picked up the Paris edition of the *Herald-Tribune* to see if the news of the Waverly massacre had broken; it had not. But there was something else, on the second page. It was another follow-up story concerning Trans-Communications' holdings in Verachten, including a partial list of the Boston conglomerate's board of directors. The third name on the roster was the senator from Massachusetts.

Joshua Appleton was not only a *consigliere* of the Matarese, he was the sole descendant of that guest list seventy years ago in Porto Vecchio to become a true inheritor.

'Mesdames et messieurs, s'il vous plait. À votre gauche, Les Îles de la Manche . . .' The voice of the pilot droned from the aircraft's speaker. They were passing the Channel Islands; in six hours they would reach the coast of Nova Scotia, an hour later Montreal. And four hours after that, Bray would cross the U.S. border south of Lacolle on the Richelieu River, into the waters of Lake Champlain.

In hours the final madness would begin. He would live or he would die. And if he could not live in peace with Toni, without the shadow of Beowulf Agate in front of him or behind him, he did not care to live any longer. He was filled with . . . emptiness. If the awful void could be erased, replaced with the simple delight of being with another human being, then years he had left were most welcome.

If not, to hell with them.

Boston.

There's someone who wants to meet you.

Who? Why?

To make you a consigliere of the Matarese . . . consider what you bring to such an organization.

It was not hard to define. Talenickov was right. Beowulf Agat knew where the bodies were, and how and why they no longer breathed. He could be invaluable.

They want you. If they can't have you, they'll kill you. So be it. He would be no prize for the Matarese.

Bray closed his eyes; he needed sleep. There would be little in the days ahead.

The rain splattered against the windshield in continuous sheets streaking to the right under the force of the wind that blew off the Atlantic over the coastal highway. Scofield had rented the car in Portland, Maine with a driver's licence and credit card he had never used before. Soon he would be in Boston but not in the way the Matarese expected. He would not race half-way across the world and announce his arrival by registering at the Ritz-Carlton as Vickery, only to wait for the Matarese's next move. A man in panic would, a man who felt the only way to save the life of someone he deeply loved would – but he was beyond panic, he had accepted total loss, therefore he could hold back and conceive of his own strategy. It was the fundamental advantage of a man who had lost hope; there was nothing not worth trying.

He would be in Boston, in his enemy's den, but his enemy would not know it. The Ritz-Carlton would receive two telegrams spaced a day apart. The first would arrive tomorrow requesting a suite for Mr B. A. Vickery of Montreal, arriving the following day. The second would be sent the next afternoon, stating that Mr Vickery had been delayed, his arrival now anticipated two days later. There would be no address for Vickery, only telegraph offices on Montreal's King and Market Streets, and no request for confirmations, the assumption here being that someone in Boston would make sure rooms were available.

Only the two telegrams, sent from Montreal; the Matarese had little choice but to believe he was still in Canada. What they could not know – suspect surely, but not be certain – was that he had used a drone to send them. He had. He had con-

tacted a man, a felony-prone *séparatiste* he had known before, and met him at the airport, giving him the two handwritten messages on telegraph forms along with a sum of money and instructions when and from where to send them. Should the Matarese phone Montreal for immediate confirmation or origin, they would find the forms written in Bray's handwriting.

He had three days and one night to operate within Matarese territory, to learn everything he could about the conglomerate, Trans-Communications, and its hierarchy. To find another flaw, one significant enough to summon Senator Joshua Appleton IV, to Boston - on *his* terms. In panic.

So much to learn, so little time.

Scofield let his mind wander back to everyone he had ever known in Boston and Cambridge - both as student and professional. Among that crowd of fits and misfits there had to be someone who could help him.

He passed a road sign telling him he had left the town of Marblehead; he'd be in Boston in less than thirty minutes.

It was 5.35, the horns of impatient drivers blaring away on all sides as the taxi inched its way down Boylston Street's crowded shopping district. He had parked the rented car in the farthest reaches of the Prudential underground lot, available should he need it, but not subject to the vagaries of weather or vandalism. He was on his way to Cambridge, a name had come into focus. A man who had spent twenty-five years teaching corporate law at the Harvard School of Business. Bray had never met him; there was no way the Matarese could make him a target.

It was strange, thought Bray, as the cab clamoured over the ribs of the Longfellow Bridge, that both he and Talenickov had been brought back - however briefly - to those places where it had begun for each of them. A lifetime ago . . . two students, one in Leningrad, one in Cambridge, Massachusetts, with a certain, not dissimilar talent for foreign languages.

He had begun a career in the State Department and been given such a fine title: Special Foreign Service Officer, Consular Operations. Neither the pay nor the grade was *trifling*. At the future was bright, productive . . . and, well, by the irony!

Had it happened that way with Talenickov from Leningrad pursued one course, veeri

gradually, inexorably driven into waters he had not known were on any map? Until the pressures were so strong there was nothing left but to become the expert in order to survive? The questions were rhetorical; neither he nor the Russian would have become what they became unless the fundamentals had been there in the first place. Events shaped men, perhaps, but they did not remove alternatives of choice. It was not a pleasant thing to think about.

Was Talenickov still alive? Or was he dead or dying somewhere in the city of Boston, Massachusetts?

Toni was alive; they'd keep her alive . . . for a while.

Don't think about them. Don't think about her now! There is no hope. Not really. Accept it, live with it. Then do the best you can . . .

The traffic congealed again at Harvard Square, the downpour causing havoc in the streets. People were crowded in storefronts, students in ponchos and jeans racing from kerb to kerb, slapping the hoods of cars, jumping over the flooded gutters, crouching under the awning of the huge newspaper stand . . .

The newspaper stand. *Newspapers From All Over The World* was the legend printed across the white sign above the canopy. Bray peered out the window, through the rain and the collection of bodies. One name, one man, dominated the observable headlines.

Waverly! David Waverly! England's Foreign Secretary!

'Let me off here,' he said to the driver, reaching for the soft travel bag and the hard-shelled briefcase at his feet.

He pushed his way through the crowd, grabbed two domestic papers off the row of twenty-odd different editions, left a dollar, ran across the street at the first break in traffic. Half a block down Massachusetts Avenue was a German-style restaurant he vaguely remembered from his student days. The entrance was jammed; Scofield excused his way to the door, using his travel bag for interference, and went inside.

There was a line waiting for tables; he went to the bar, and ordered Scotch. The drink arrived; he unfolded the first newspaper. It was the *Boston Globe*; he started reading, his eyes racing over the words, picking out the salient points of the article. He finished and picked up the second paper; it was the *Los Angeles Times*, the story identical to the *Globe's* wire service report, and almost surely the official version put out by Whitehall, which was what Bray wanted to know.

how wide the Corsican fever had spread, into what rarefied circles of power it had reached.

He finished his drink, left his money on the bar with the two newspapers and looked around for a telephone. The name that had come into focus, the man he wanted to see, was Dr Theodore Goldman, a dean of the Harvard School of Business and a thorn in the side of the Justice Department. For he was an outspoken critic of the Anti-Trust Division, incessantly claiming that Justice prosecuted the minnows and let the sharks roam free. He was a middle-aged *enfant terrible* who enjoyed taking on the giants, for he was a giant himself, cloaking his genius behind a facade of good-humoured innocence that fooled no one.

If anyone could shed light on the conglomerate called Trans-Communications, it was Goldman.

Bray did not know the man, but he had met Goldman's son a year ago in the Hague – in circumstances that were potentially disastrous for a young pilot in the Air Force. Aaron Goldman had got drunk with the wrong people near the Groote Kerk, men known to be involved in a KGB infiltration of NATO. The son of a prominent American Jew was prime material for the Soviets.

An unknown intelligence officer had got the pilot away from the scene, slapped him into sobriety and told him to go back to his base. And after countless cups of coffee, Aaron Goldman had expressed his thanks.

'If you've got a kid who wants to go to Harvard, let me know, no matter how poor you are. I'll talk to my dad, I swear it. What the hell's his name anyway?'

'Never mind,' Scofield had said. 'Just get out of here, and don't buy typing paper at the Co-op. It's cheaper down the block.'

'What the ...'

'Get out of here.'

Bray saw the pay phone on the wall; he grabbed his luggage and walked over to it.

mother's way of saying he was plastered.' She gestured toward a squared-off, double doorway so common to old New England houses. 'Theo's on the telephone and trying to mix his stingers at the same time; it's making him frantic. He hates the telephone and loves his evening stinger.'

Theodore Goldman was not much taller than his wife, but there was an expansiveness about him that made him appear much larger than he was. His intellect could not be concealed, so he took refuge in humour, putting guests – and, no doubt, associates – at ease.

They sat in three leather armchairs that faced the fire, the Goldmans with their stingers, Bray drinking Scotch. The rain outside was heavy, drumming on the windows. The recapping of their son's escapade in The Hague was over quickly, Scofield dismissing it as a minor night out on the town.

'With major consequences, I suspect,' said Goldman, 'if a known intelligence officer hadn't been in the vicinity.'

'Your son's a good pilot.'

'He'd better be; he's not much of a drinker.' Goldman sat back in his chair. 'But now, since we've met this unknown gentleman who's been kind enough to give us his name, what can we do for him?'

'To begin with, please don't tell anyone I came to see you.'

'That sounds ominous, Mr Vickery. I'm not sure I approve of Washington's tactics in these areas.'

'I'm no longer attached to the government; the request is personal. Frankly, the government doesn't approve of me any longer, because in my former capacity, I think I uncovered information Washington – especially the Department of Justice – doesn't want exposed. I believe it should be; that's as plain as I can put it.'

Goldman, the legal nemesis of the Justice Department, rose at the occasion. 'That's plain enough.'

'In all honesty, I used my brief meeting with your son as an excuse to talk to you. It's not admirable, but it's the truth.'

'I admire the truth. Why did you want to see me?'

Scofield put his glass down. 'There's a company here in Boston, at least the corporate headquarters are here. It's a conglomerate called Trans-Communications.'

'It certainly is.' Goldman chuckled. 'The Alabaster Bride of Boston. The Queen of Congress Street.'

remove all outside competitors. *That's* what multi-nationals are all about, and Trans-Comm's one of the most successful anywhere in the world.'

Bray watched the lawyer as he spoke. Goldman was a born teacher – infectious in delivery, his voice rising with enthusiasm. 'I understand what you're saying, but you lost me with one statement. You said you could name four or five other countries where Trans-Comm has heavy investments. How can you do that?'

'Not just me,' objected Goldman. 'Anybody can. All he has to do is read and use a little imagination. The laws, Mr Scofield. The laws of the host country.'

'The laws? Of a host country?'

'They're the only things that can't be avoided, the only protection buyers and sellers have. In the international financial community they take the place of armies. Every conglomerate must adhere to the laws of the country in which its divisions operate. Now, these same laws often ensure confidentiality; they're the frameworks within which the multi-nationals have to function – corrupting and altering them when they can, of course. And since they do, they must seek intermediaries to represent them. *Legally*. A Boston attorney practising before the Massachusetts bar would be of little value in Hong Kong. Or Essen.'

'What are you driving at?' Bray asked.

'You study the *law firms*,' Goldman leaned forward again. 'You match the firms and their locations with the general level of their clients and the services for which they're most recognized.'

Then you find one that's known for negotiating stock purchases and exchanges, you look around to see what companies in the area might be ripe for invading.' The legal academician was enjoying himself. 'It's really quite simple,' he continued, 'and a hell of an amusing game to play. I've scared the be-jesus out of more than one corporate flunkie in those summer seminars by telling him where I thought his company's money men were heading. I've got a little index file – three by five cards – where I jot down my goodies.'

Scofield spoke; he had to know. 'What about Trans-Comm? Did you ever do a file card on it?'

'Oh, sure. That's what I meant about the other countries.'

'What are they?'

staggering. Trans-Communications was an idea born and developed in the mind of one man. Nicholas Guiderone.'

'I've heard of him. A modern day Carnegie or Rockefeller, isn't he?'

'More. Much more. The Geneens, the Luces, the Bluhdorns, the wonderboys of Detroit and Wall Street, none of them can touch Guiderone. He's the last of the vanishing giants, a really benign monarch of industry and finance. He's been honoured by most of the major governments of the West, and not a few in the Eastern bloc, including Moscow.'

'Moscow?'

'Certainly,' said Goldman, nodding thanks to his wife, who was pouring a second stinger into his glass. 'No one's done more to open up East-West trade than Nicholas Guiderone. As a matter of fact I can't think of anyone who's done more for world trade in general. He's over eighty now, but I understand he's still filled with as much pee and vinegar as he was the day he walked out of Boston Latin.'

'He's from Boston?'

'Yes, a remarkable story. He came to this country as a boy. An immigrant boy of ten or eleven, without a mother, travelling with a barely literate father in the hold of a ship. I suppose you could call it the definitive story of the American dream.'

Involuntarily, Scofield gripped the arm of the chair. He could feel the pressure on his chest, the tightening in his throat. 'Where did that ship come from?'

'Italy,' said Goldman, sipping his drink. 'Southern part. ly, or one of the islands.'

Bray was almost afraid to ask the question. 'Would you by any chance know whether Nicholas Guiderone ever knew a member of the Appleton family?'

Goldman looked over the rim of his glass. 'I know it, and so does most everyone in Boston. Guiderone's father worked for the Appletons. For the senator's grandfather at Appleton Hall. It was old Appleton who spotted the boy's promise, gave him the backing, and persuaded the schools to take him. It wasn't so easy in those days, the early nineteen hundreds. The two-toilet Irish had barely got their second john, and there weren't too many of them. An Italian kid - excuse me, Eyetalian - was nowhere. Gutter meat.'

Bray's words floated; he could hardly hear them himself.

of thing. His plea was for international relationships based on the mutuality of material need, which he claimed would lead to a higher morality. It was a little strange philosophically, but it was damned effective. So effective, in fact, that there's a resolution on this session's agenda that'll make him a full-fledged member of the U.N.'s Economic Council. That's not just a title, by the way. With his expertise and resources, there's not a government in the world which won't listen very hard when he talks. He'll be one damned powerful *amicus curiae*.'

'Did you hear him give that speech?'

'Sure,' laughed the lawyer. 'It was mandatory in Boston; you were cut off the *Globe*'s subscription list if you missed it. We saw the whole thing on Public Television.'

'What did he sound like?'

Goldman creased the flesh around his deep-set eyes and looked at his wife. 'Well, he's a very old man. Still vigorous, but nevertheless old. How would you describe him, darling?'

'Just as you do,' said Anne. 'An old man. Not large, but quite striking, with that look of a man who's so used to being listened to. I do remember one thing, though - about the voice. It was high-pitched and maybe a little breathless, but he spoke extremely clearly, every phrase very precise. You couldn't miss a word he said.'

Scofield closed his eyes and thought of a blind woman in the mountains above Corsica's Porto Vecchio, twisting the dials of a radio, and hearing *a voice crueller than the wind*.

He had found the shepherd boy.

I can't think about them any longer. I've got to put them out of my mind; they intrude, they interfere, they are barriers. They do not exist; she does not exist and I have lost her. We will not grow old together; there is no hope . . . Now, move. For Christ's sake move!

He had left the Goldmans quickly, thanking them, bewildering them by his abrupt departure. He had asked only a few more questions—about the Appleton family—questions any knowledgeable person in Boston could answer. Having the information was all he needed; there was no point in staying longer. He walked now in the rain, smoking a cigarette, his thoughts on the missing fragment his instinct told him was a greater weapon than the shepherd boy, yet somehow part of the shepherd boy, intrinsic to the deceptions of Nicholas Guiderone. What was it? Where was the false note he heard so clearly?

He knew one thing, however, and it was more than instinct. He had enough to panic Senator Joshua Appleton IV. He would telephone the senator in Washington and quietly recite a bill-of-particulars that began over seventy years ago, on the date of 4 April 1911, in the hills of Porto Vecchio. Did the senator have anything to say? Could he shed any light on an organization known as the Matarese which began its activities in the second decade of the century—at Sarajevo, perhaps—by selling political murder? An organization the Appleton family had never left, for it could be traced to a white skyscraper in Boston, a company honoured by the senator's presence on its board of directors. The age of Aquarius had turned into the age of conspiracy. A man in his march to the White House would have to panic, and in panic mistakes were made.

But panic could be controlled. The Matarese would mount the senator's defences swiftly, the presidency too great a prize to lose. And charges levelled by a traitor were no charges at all; they were merely words spoken by a man who had betrayed his country.

Instinct. Look at the man—the *man*—more closely.

Joshua Appleton was *not* as he was perceived to be by the nation. The middle-aged paternal figure whose appeal ran across the spectrum. Then what about the day-to-day individual? Was *that* the smaller life, a dwarf with warts and blackheads and bloated appetites? Was it possible that the everyday man had

the floor unconscious.

He crouched in silence, removing the short-barrelled revolver from the nurse's pocket, waiting for sounds or signs of people. The scream must have been heard by anyone inside the house.

There was nothing - there was something, but it was so faint he could not channel a perception of what it was. He saw a telephone next to the staircase and crept over to pick it up. There was only the hum of a dial tone; no one was using the phone. Perhaps the woman had told the truth; it was entirely possible that Mrs Appleton had retired. He'd know shortly.

First, he had to know something else. He went back to the nurse, pulled her across the floor under the hallway light and ripped apart the front of her uniform. He tore the slip and brassiere beneath, pushed up her left breast, and studied the flesh.

There it was. The small, jagged blue circle as Talenickov had described it. The birthmark that was no birthmark at all, but instead, the mark of the Matarese.

Suddenly, from above, there was the whirring sound of a motor, the vibration constant, bass-toned. Bray lunged across the unconscious body of the nurse, into the shadows of the stairs, and raised the revolver.

From around the curve of the first landing an old woman came into view. She was sitting in the ornate chair of an automatic lift, her frail hands holding the sculptured pole that shot up from the guard rail. She was encased in a high-collared dressing gown of dark grey, and her once-delicate face was ravaged, her voice strained.

'I imagine that's one way to leash the bitch-hound, or corner the wolf-in-season, but if your objective is sexual, young man, I question your taste.'

Mrs Joshua Appleton III was drunk. From the looks of her, he had been drunk for years.

My only objective, Mrs Appleton, is to see you. This woman tried to stop me; this is her gun, not mine. I'm an experienced intelligence officer employed by the United States government and fully prepared to show you my identification. In light of what

vinced I can contain it. You see, Mrs Appleton, I think it's very important for this country that none of this touch the senator.'

'Then I haven't been clear, Mrs Appleton. The report from Europe is devastating and I need information. Before your son ran for office, how closely did he work with his father in the Appleton business ventures? Did he travel frequently to Europe with your husband? Who were his closest friends here in Boston? That's terribly important. People that only you might know, men and women who came to see him at Appleton Hall.'

'"Appleton Hall . . . way up on Appleton Hill",' broke in the old woman in a strained, whispered sing-song of no discernible tune. '"With the grandest view of Boston . . . and ever will be still". Joshua the First wrote that over a hundred years ago. It's not very good, but they say he picked out the notes on a harpsichord. So like the Joshuas, a harpsichord. So like us all, really.'

'Mrs Appleton? After your son came back from the Korean War . . .'

'We *never* discuss that war!' For an instant the old woman's eyes became focused, hostile. Then the clouds returned. 'Of course, when my son is President they won't wheel me out like Rose or Miss Lillian. I'm kept for very special occasions.' She paused and laughed a soft, eerie laugh that was self-mocking. 'After very *special* sessions with the doctor.' She paused again and raised her left forefinger to her lips. 'You see, young man, sobriety isn't my strongest suit.'

Scofield watched her closely, saddened by what he saw. Beneath the ravaged face there had been a lovely face, the eyes once clear and alive, not floating in dead sockets as they were now. 'I'm sorry. It must be painful to know that.'

'On the contrary,' she replied whimsically. It was her turn to study him. 'Do you think you're clever?'

'I've never thought about it one way or the other.' *Instinct*. 'How long have you been . . . ill, Mrs Appleton?'

'As long as I care to remember and that is quite long enough, thank you.'

Bray looked again at the decanters. 'Has the senator been here recently?'

at him, the brandy filling her head. 'Wars kill so much more than the bodies they take. Terrible things happen. Did they happen to you, young man?'

'They've happened to me.'

'Did they do those awful things to you?'

'What awful things, Mrs Appleton?'

'Starve you, beat you, bury you alive, your nostrils filled with dirt and mud, unable to breathe? Dying slowly, consciously, wide-awake and dying.'

The old woman was describing tortures documented by men held captive in North Korean camps. What was the relevance?

'No, those things didn't happen to me.'

'They happened to him, you know. The doctors told me. It's what made him change. Inside. Change so much. But we must never talk about it.'

'Talk about? . . .' What was *she* talking about? 'You mean the senator?'

'Shhh!' The old woman drank the remainder of the brandy. 'We must never, *never* talk about it.'

'I see,' said Bray, but he did *not* see. Senator Joshua Appleton IV had never been held captive by the North Koreans. Captain

'but I can't say I ever noticed any great changes in him, other than getting older. Of course, I didn't know him that well twenty years ago, but to me he's still one of the finest men I've ever known.'

'*Inside!*' The old woman whispered harshly. 'It's all inside! He's a *mask* . . . and people adore him so.' Suddenly the tears were in her clouded eyes, and the words that followed a cry from deep within her memory. 'They *should* adore him! He was such a beautiful boy, such a beautiful young man. There was no one ever like my Josh, no one more loving, more filled with kindness! . . . Until they did those terrible things to him.' She wept. 'And I was such a dreadful person. I was his mother and I couldn't understand. I wanted my Joshua back! I wanted him back so badly!'

Bray knelt down and took the glass from her. 'What do you mean you wanted him back?'

'I couldn't understand. He was so cold, so distant. They'd

taken the joy out of him. There was no *joy* in him! He came out of the hospital . . . and the pain had been too much and I *couldn't* understand. He looked at me and there was no joy, no love. No inside!

'The hospital? The accident after the war - just after the war?'

'He suffered so much . . . and I was drinking so much . . . so much. Every week he was in that awful war I drank more and more. I couldn't stand it! He was all I *had*. My husband was . . . in name only - as much my fault as his, I suppose. He was disgusted with me. But I loved my Josh so.' The old woman reached for the glass. He got to it first and poured her a drink. She looked at him through her tears, her floating eyes filled with the sadness of knowing what she was. 'I thank you very much,' she said with simple dignity.

'You're welcome,' he answered, feeling helpless, his mind pounding, but nevertheless helpless.

'In a way,' she whispered, gripping the glass tightly, 'I still have him but he doesn't know it. No one does.'

'How is that?'

'When I moved out of Appleton Hall . . . on Appleton Hill . . . I kept his room just the way it was, the way it had been. You see, he never came back, not really. Only for an hour one night to pick up some things. So I took a room here and made it his. It will always be his, but he doesn't know it.'

Bray knelt down in front of her again. 'Mrs Appleton, may I see that room? *Please*, may I see it?'

'Oh, no, that wouldn't be right,' she said. 'It's very private. It's his, and I'm the only one he lets in. He lives there still, you see. My beautiful Joshua.'

'I've got to see that room, Mrs Appleton. Where is it?' *Instinct.*

'Why do you have to see it?'

'I can help you. I can help your son. I know it.'

She squinted, studying him from some inner place. 'You're a kind man, aren't you? And you're not as young as I thought. Your face has lines, and there is grey at your temples. You have a strong mouth; did anyone ever tell you that?'

'No, I don't think anyone ever did. Please, Mrs Appleton, I *must* see that room. Allow me to.'

'It's nice that you ask. People rarely ask me for anything any more; they just tell me. Very well, help me to my lift, and we'll go upstairs. You understand, of course, we'll have to knock first. If he says you can't come in, you'll have to stay outside.'

Scofield guided her through the living room arch to the chair lift. He walked beside her up the staircase to the first-floor landing, where he helped her to her feet.

'Thus way,' she said, gesturing towards a narrow, darkened corridor. 'It's the last door on the right.'

They reached it, stood in front of it for a moment, and then the old woman rapped lightly on the wood. 'We'll know in a minute,' she continued, bending her head as if listening for a command from within. 'It's all right,' she said, smiling. 'He said you can come in, but you mustn't touch anything. He has everything arranged the way he likes it.' She opened the door, and flipped a switch on the wall. Three separate lamps went on; still the light was dim. Shadows were thrown across the floor and up on the walls.

The room was a young man's room, mementoes of an expensive youth on display everywhere. The banners above the bed and the desk were those of Andover and Princeton, the trophies on the shelves for such sports as sailing, skiing, tennis and lacrosse. The room had been preserved - cerily preserved - as if it had once belonged to a Renaissance prince. A microscope sat alongside a chemistry set, a volume of *Britannica* lay open, most of the page underlined, handwritten notes in the margins. On the bedside table were novels of Dos Passos and Koestler, beside them the typewritten title page of an essay authored by the celebrated inhabitant of that room. It was called: *The Pleasures and Responsibilities of Sailing in Deep Waters. Submitted by Joshua Appleton, Senior. Andover Academy, March 1945.* Protruding from below the bed were three pairs of shoes: loafers, sneakers and black patent leathers worn with formal clothes. A life somehow covered in the display.

Bray winced in the dim light. He was in the tomb of a man very much alive, the artefacts of a life preserved, somehow meant to transport the dead safely on its journey through the darkness. It was a macabre experience when one thought of Joshua Appleton, the electric mesmerizing con-artist from

chusetts. Scofield glanced at the old woman. She was staring impassively at a cluster of photographs on the wall. Bray took a step forward and looked at them.

They were pictures of a younger Joshua Appleton and several friends – the same friends, apparently the crew of a sailboat – the occasion identified by the centre photograph. It showed a long banner being held by four men standing on the deck of a sloop *Marblehead Regatta Championship – Summer 1949*.

Only the centre photograph and the three above it showed all four crew members. The three lower photographs were shot of only two of the four. Appleton and another young man, both stripped to the waist – slender, muscular, shaking hands above a tiller; smiling at the camera as they stood on either side of the mast, and sitting on the gunwhale, drinks held forward in salute.

Scofield looked closely at the two men, then compared them to their associates. Appleton and his obviously closer friend had a strength about them absent in the other two, a sense of assurance, of conviction somehow. They were not alike except perhaps in height and breadth – athletic men comfortable in the company of each's peer – yet neither were they dissimilar. Both had sharp if distinctly different features – strong jaws, wide foreheads, large eyes and thatches of straight, dark hair – the kind of faces seen in scores of Ivy League yearbooks.

There was something disturbing about the photographs. Bray did not know what it was – but it was there. *Instinct*.

'They look as if they could be cousins,' he said.

'For years they acted as though they were *brothers*,' replied the old woman. 'In peace, they would be *partners*, in war, *soldiers* together! But he was a coward, he betrayed my son. My beautiful Joshua went to war alone and terrible things were done to him. He ran away to Europe, to the safety of a château in France and Switzerland. But justice is odd; he died in Gstaad, from injuries on a slope. To the best of my knowledge, my son has never mentioned his name since.'

'Since? . . . When was that?'

'Twenty-five years ago.'

'Who was he?'

She told him.

Scofield could not breathe; there was no air in the room, only shadows in a vacuum. He had found the shepherd boy, but

instinct told him to look for something else, a fragment as
awesome as anything he had learned. He had found it. The most
devastating piece of the puzzle was in place. He needed only
proof, even the semblance of proof, for the truth was so extra-
ordinary

He was in a tomb, the dead had journeyed in darkness for
twenty-five years

He guided the old woman to her bedroom, poured her a final brandy and left her. As he closed the door she was sitting on the bed chanting that unsingable tune. *Appleton Hall . . . way up on Appleton Hill.*

Notes picked out on a harpsichord over a hundred years ago. Notes lost, as she was lost without ever knowing why.

He returned to the dimly-lit room that was the resting place of memories and went to the cluster of photographs on the wall. He removed one and pulled the small picture hook out of the plaster, smoothing the wallpaper around the hole; it might delay discovery, certainly not prevent it. He turned off the lights, closed the door, and went downstairs to the front hall.

The guard-nurse was still unconscious; he left her where she was. There was nothing to be gained by moving her or killing her. He turned off every light, including the carriage lamps above the front steps, opened the door and slipped out into Louisburg Square. On the pavement, he turned right and began walking rapidly to the corner where he would turn right again, descending Beacon Hill into Charles Street to find a taxi. He had to pick up his luggage in the subway locker in Cambridge. The walk down the hill gave him time to think, time to remove the photograph from its glass frame, folding it carefully into his pocket - folding it very carefully so that neither face was damaged.

He needed a place to stay. A place to sit and fill up pages of

The clerk stopped. 'Isn't that just like him, though? To *remember*? Most people go through an experience like that and just want to forget the whole thing. They figure they beat the reaper so the hell with everybody. Until next time, of course. But not him; he's so . . . well, concerned, if you know what I mean.'

'Yes, I do.'

'The *votahs* know it too, let me tell you. The Bay State's going to have its first President since J.F.K. And there won't be any of that religious nonsense about the Pope and the *cahdnells* running the White House, neither.'

'No, there won't,' agreed Bray. 'I'd like to stress again the confidential nature of my being here. The senator doesn't want any publicity about his little gesture . . .' Scofield paused and smiled at the woman. 'And as of now you're the only person in Boston who knows.'

'Oh, don't you worry about that. As we used to say when we were kids, my lips are sealed. And I'd really treasure a note from Senator Appleton, with his signature and everything, I mean.' The woman stopped and tapped a file cabinet. 'Here we are,' she said, opening the drawer. 'Now, remember, all that's here are the names of the doctors - surgeons, anaesthesiologists, consultants - listed by floor and Operation Room desks; the staff nurses assigned, and a schedule of the equipment used. There are no psychiatric or medical evaluations; they can only be obtained directly through the physician. But then you're not in any of that; you'd think I was *talkin'* to one of those damned insurance sneaks.' She gave him the file. 'There's a table at the end of the aisle. When you're finished, just leave the folder on my desk.'

'That's okay,' said Bray, knowing better. 'I'll put it back; no sense bothering you. Thanks again.'

'Thank you.'

Scofield read through the pages rapidly to get a general impression. Medically, most of what he read was beyond his comprehension, but the conclusion was inescapable. Joshua Appleton had been more dead than alive when the ambulance had brought him to the hospital from the collision on the Turnpike. Lacerations, contusions, convulsions, fractures, along with severe head and neck wounds, painted the bloody picture of a mutilated human face and body. There were lists of drugs



'Tertiary kinetics.'

Scofield looked at the student. 'Someone once used the word "tertiary" with me when I was in school around here. I didn't know what he meant.'

'You probably went to Harvard, man. That's turkey-time. I was at Tech.'

Bray was glad the old school spirit was still alive in Cambridge. 'What have you got?' he asked, looking at the screen above the keyboard. The black had keyed in the name of the first doctor.

'I've got an omniscient tape, and you've got nothin'.'

'What do you mean?'

'The good doctor doesn't exist. Not as far as this institution is concerned. He's never so much as dispensed an aspirin in this joint.'

'That's crazy. He was listed in the Appleton records.'

'Speak to the lord-of-the-*phi*'s, man. I punched the letters and up comes *No Rec.*'

'I know something about these machines. They're easily programmed.'

The black nodded. 'Which means they're easily de-programmed. Rectified, as it were. Your doctor was *dee*-leted. Maybe he stole from Medicare.'

'Maybe. Let's try the next.'

The student keyed in the name. 'Well, we know what happened to this boy. *Ceb Hem*. He died right here on the third floor. Cerebral haemorrhage. Never even got a chance to get his tuition back.'

'What do you mean?'

'Med school, man. He was only thirty-two. Hell of a way to go at thirty-two.'

'Also unusual. What's the date?'

'21 March 1954.'

'Appleton was discharged on the thirtieth,' said Scofield as much to himself as to the student. 'These three names are nurses. Try them, please.'

Katherine Connally. Deceased 3-26-54.

Alice Bonelli. Deceased 3-26-54.

Janet Drummond. Deceased 3-26-54.

The student sat back, he was not a fool. 'Seems there was a real epidemic back then, wasn't there? March was a rough month, and the twenty-sixth was a *baad* day for three little girls in white.'

'Any cause of death?'

'Nothin' listed. Which only means they didn't die on the premises.'

'But all three on the same day? It's . . .'

'I dig,' said the young man 'Crazy.' He held up his hand.

'Hey, there's an old cat who's been here for about six thousand years. He runs the supply room on the first floor. He might remember something. Let me get him on the horn.' The black wheeled his chair around and reached for a telephone on the counter. 'Get on line two,' he said to Bray, pointing to another phone on a nearby table.

'First floor supply,' was the voice in a loud Irish brogue.

'Hey, Methuselah, this is Amos . . . as in Amos and Andy.'

'You're a nutty boy-o, you are.'

'Hey, Jimmy, I got this funky friend on the horn here. He's looking for information that goes back to when you were the terror of the angels' dorm. As a matter of fact, it concerns three of them. Jimmy, you recall a time in the middle 'fifties when three nurses all died on the same day?'

'Three . . . The breath over the line was that of a man remembering. 'Oh, indeed I do. 'Twas a terrible thing. Little Katie Connolly was one . . .'

'What happened?' asked Bray.

'They drowned . . . All three of the girls drowned. They was in a boat and the damn thing pitched over, thrown 'em into a bad sea.'

'In a boat? In March?'

'One of those crazy . . . sir. You know how rich kids prol around the nurses' dormitories. They figure the girls see naked bodies all the time so maybe they wouldn't mind lookin' at theirs. Well, one night these punk-swells were throwin' a party at this fancy yacht club and asked the girls up. There was drinkin' and all kinds of boozin' and some jackass got the bright idea to take out a boat. Damn fool thing, of course. As you say, it . . . I was in March.'

'Where did it happen?' asked Scofield. 'Can you remember?'

'Sure, I can, sir. It was up the coast. Marblehead.'

Bray closed his eyes. 'Thank you,' he said quietly, replacing the phone.

'Thanks, Methuselah.' The student hung up, his eyes on Scofield. 'You got trouble, don't you?'

'I got trouble,' agreed Bray, walking back to the keyboard. 'I've also got ten more names. Two doctors and eight nurses. Can you run them through for me just as fast as you can?'

Of the eight nurses, exactly half were still alive. One had moved to San Francisco - address unknown; another lived with a daughter in Dallas, and the remaining two were in the St Agnes Retirement Home in Worcester. One of the doctors was still alive. The skin-graft specialist had died eighteen months ago at the age of seventy-three. The first surgeon, Nathaniel Crawford, had retired and was living in Quincy.

'May I use your phone?' asked Scofield. 'I'll pay whatever charges there are.'

'Last time I looked, none of these horns was in my name. Be my guest.'

Bray had written down the number on the screen; he went to the telephone and dialled.

'Crawford here.' The voice from Quincy was brusque but not discourteous.

'My name is Scofield, sir. We've never met and I'm not a physician, but I'm very interested in a case you were involved with a number of years ago at Massachusetts General. I'd like to discuss it briefly with you, if you wouldn't mind.'

'Who was the patient? I had a few thousand.'

'Senator Joshua Appleton, sir.'

There was a slight pause on the line; when Crawford spoke, his brusque voice took on an added tone of weariness. 'Those goddamned incidents have a way of following a man to his grave; don't they? Well, I haven't practised for over two years now, so whatever *you* say or *I* say, it won't make any goddamned difference . . . let's say I made a mistake.'

'Mistake?'

'I didn't make many; I was head of surgery for damn near twelve years. My summary's in the Appleton medical file; the only reasonable conclusion is that the X-rays got fouled up, or the scanning equipment gave us the wrong data.'

Division - Current and Past Publications. Microfilm.

He went to the counter at the far end of the room and spoke to the clerk behind it.

'March and April 1954, please. The *Globe* or the *Examiner* whatever's available.'

He was given eight boxes of film, and assigned a cubicle. He found it, sat down and inserted the first roll of film.

By March of '54 the bulletins detailing the condition of Joshua Appleton - 'Captain Josh' - had been relegated to back pages; he had been in the hospital over twenty weeks then. But he was not ignored. The famous vigil was covered in detail. Bray wrote down the names of several of those interviewed whom he would know by tomorrow whether there'd be any reason to get in touch with them.

21 March 1954

Young Doctor Dies of Cerebral Haemorrhage

The brief story was on page sixteen. No mention of the fact that the surgeon had attended Joshua Appleton.

26 March 1954

Three Mass. Gen'l Nurses

Killed in Freak Boating Accident

The story had made the lower left corner of the front page, but there was no mention of Joshua Appleton. Indeed, it would have been strange if there had been; the three were on a total twenty-four-hour schedule. If they were all in Marblehead that night, who was at the Appleton bedside?

10 April 1954

Bostonian Dies in Gstaad Skiing Tragedy

He had found it.

It was - naturally - on the front page, the headlines prominent, the copy written as much to evoke sympathy as to report the tragic death of a young man. Scofield studied the story until he found that he would come to certain lines.

He did.

He saw the student walk through the bar's entrance. Scofield stood up briefly; Amos saw him and came over. There was a manilla envelope in his hand and Bray felt a quick acceleration in his chest.

'I gather everything went all right,' he said.

'I had to sign for it.'

'You *what*?' Bray was sick; it was such a little thing, an obvious thing, and he had not thought of it.

'Take it easy. I wasn't brought up on 135th Street and Lennox Avenue for nothing.'

'What name did you use?' asked Scofield, his pulse receding.

'R. M. Nixon. The receptionist was real nice. She thanked me.'

'You'll go far, Amos.'

'I intend to.'

'I hope this'll help.' Bray handed his envelope across the table.

The student held it between his fingers. 'Hey, man, you know you don't really have to do this.'

'Of course, I do. We had an agreement.'

'I know that. But I've got an idea you've gone through a lot of sweat for a lot of people you don't know.'

'And a number that I know very well. The money's incidental. Use it.' Bray opened his attaché case and slipped the envelope inside — right above a file folder containing Joshua Appleton's X-ray from twenty-five years ago. 'Remember, you never knew my name and you never went to Washington. If you're *ever* asked, you merely ran some forgotten names through a computer for a man who never identified himself. *Please*. Remember that.'

'That's going to be tough.'

'Why?' Scofield was alarmed.

'How am I going to dedicate my first textbook to you?'

Bray smiled. 'You'll think of something. Goodbye,' he said, getting out of the booth. 'I've got an hour's drive and several more of sleep to catch up on.'

'Stay well, man.'

'Thanks, professor.'

Scofield stood in the dentist's waiting room on Main Street in Andover, Massachusetts. The name of the dentist had been

Bray sat in the front seat of the car, his breathing erratic, perspiration on his forehead. He opened the envelopes and took out the X-ray sheets.

He pulled off the small strips of tape that covered the names. He had been right. The awesome fragment was irrevocably in place, the proof in his hand.

The man who sat in the Senate, the man who unquestionably would be the next President of the United States, was not Joshua Appleton IV.

He was Julian Guiderone, son of the Shepherd Boy.

There would be a subtle omission in the mechanics of the exchange, a seeming weakness the enemy would pounce on; but it would be calculated, no weakness at all. The Matarese would be forced to go through with the exchange. A Corsican girl and a Soviet intelligence officer for X-rays that showed incontrovertibly that the man sitting in the Senate, on his way to the presidency, was not Joshua Appleton IV – legend of Korea, politician extraordinary – but instead, a man supposedly buried in 1954 in the Swiss village of Col du Pillon.

He drove down towards Salem harbour, drawn as he was always drawn towards the water, not precisely sure what he was looking for until he saw it: a shield-shaped sign on the lawn of a small hotel. *Efficiency Suites*. It made sense. Rooms with a refrigerator and cooking facilities. There'd be no stranger eating in restaurants; it was not the tourist season in Salem.

He parked the car in a lot covered with white gravel and bordered by a white picket fence, the grey water of the harbour across the way. He carried his attaché case and travel bag inside, registered under an innocuous name, and asked for a suite.

'Will payment be made by credit card, sir?' asked the young woman behind the counter.

'I beg your pardon?'

'You didn't check off the method of payment. If it's a credit card, our policy is to run the card through the machine.'

'I see. No, actually, I'm one of those strange people who use cal money. One man's fight against plastic. Why don't I pay you for a week in advance? I doubt I'll stay any longer.' He gave her the money. 'I assume there's a grocery store nearby.'

'Yes, sir. Just up the street.'

'What about other stores? I've a number of things to get.'

'There's the Shopping Plaza about ten blocks west. I'm sure you'll find everything you need there.'

Bray hoped so; he was counting on it.

He was taken to his 'suite', which was in effect one large room with a pull-out bed and divider that concealed the smallest stove this side of a hot plate and a refrigerator. But the room looked out over the harbour; it was fine. He opened his attaché case, took out the photograph he had removed from the wall on Mrs Appleton's tomb for her son, and stared at it. Two young men, tall, muscular, neither to be mistaken for the other, but

X-rays were affixed to the upper left-hand corners. He checked carefully to see that the borders of the cardboard sheets matched; they did. He pressed a manilla envelope down on the top sheet between the first and second rows of X-rays, took the razor blade and began to cut, slicing deeply so that the blade went through both sheets of X-rays. The top row fell clean, two strips of four X-ray negatives.

The names of the patients and dates of entry — typed on the small red-bordered labels over thirty-five years ago — were on the strips; the simplest chemical analysis would confirm their authenticity.

Bray doubted whether any such analysis would be made on the new labels he would purchase and stick on the remaining two sheets with twelve X-rays each; it would be a waste of time. The X-rays themselves would be compared with new X-rays of the man who called himself Joshua Appleton IV. Julian Guidicelli. That was all the proof the Matarese would need.

He took the strips and the larger sheets of negatives, knelt down and carefully buffed the edges of the cuts across the rug. Within five minutes each of the edges was rubbed smooth and soiled just enough to match the age of the original borders.

He got up and put everything back in his attaché case. It was time to return to Andover, to put the plan in motion.

'Mr Vickery, is something wrong?' asked the dentist, coming out of his office, still harried, three afternoon patients reading magazines, glancing up in mild irritation.

'I'm afraid I forgot something. May I speak with you for a second?'

'Come on in here,' said the dentist, ushering Scofield into a small workroom, the shelves lined with impressions of teeth mounted on movable clamps. He lit a cigarette from a pack on the counter. 'I don't mind telling you it's been one hell of a day. What's the matter?'

'The laws, actually.' Bray smiled, opening his attaché case and taking out the two envelopes. 'HR Seven-Four-Eight-Five.'

'What the hell is that?'

'A new congressional regulation, part of the post-Watergate morality. Whenever a government employee borrows property from any source, for whatever purpose, a full description of said property must be accompanied by a signed authorization.'

type it up, will you? I'll sign it outside.' He crushed out his cigarette and extended his hand. 'Nice to meet you, Mr Vickery. We've really got to get back in there.'

'Just one more thing, sir. Would you mind initialling these sheets and dating them?' Bray separated the X-rays and placed them on the counter.

'Not at all,' said the dentist.

Scotfield drove back to Salem. A great deal was still to be clarified, new decisions to be made as events shaped them, but he had his overall plan; he had a place to begin. It was almost time for Mr B. A. Vickery to arrive at the Ritz-Carlton, but not yet.

He had stopped earlier at the Shopping Plaza in Salem where he had found small red-bordered labels almost identical to those used over thirty-five years ago, and a store selling typewriters where he had typed in the names and the dates, rubbing them lightly to give the labels an appearance of age. And while walking to his car he had looked briefly around at the shops, again seeing what he had hoped to see.

*Copies Made While you Wait
Equipment Bought, Sold, Leased
Expert Service*

It was conveniently two doors away from a liquor store, three from a supermarket. He would stop there now and have copies made of his bill-of-particulars, and afterwards pick up something to drink and eat. He would be in his room for a long time; he had phone calls to make. They would take five to seven hours to complete. They had to be routed on a very precise schedule through Lisbon.

Bray watched as the manager of the Plaza Duplicating Service extracted the collated sheets of his indictment from the levels of grey trays that protruded from the machine. He had chatted briefly with the balding man, remarking that he was doing a favour for a nephew; the young fellow was taking one of those creative writing courses at Emerson and had entered some sort of college competition.

'That kid's got some imagination,' said the manager, clipping the stacks of copies together.

'Oh, did you read it?'

and a Park-Sherman scale that measured weight in ounces and grammes. A final stop had been at the Salem Post Office where he had bought fifty dollars' worth of stamps.

A porterhouse steak and a bottle of Scotch completed his shopping list. He spread his purchases on the bed, removing some to the table, others to the Formica counter between the Lilliputian stove and refrigerator. He poured himself a drink and sat in the chair in front of the window overlooking the harbour. It was growing dark, the water barely seen except where it reflected the lights of the piers.

He drank the whisky in short swallows, letting the alcohol spread, suspending all thought. He had no more than ten minutes before the telephone calls would begin. His cannon were in place, his nuclear bomb in its rack. It was vital now that everything take place in sequence – always sequence – and that meant choosing the right words at the right time; there was no room for error. To do that, to avoid error, his mind had to be free, loose, unencumbered – capable of listening closely, picking up nuances.

Toni? . . .

No!

He closed his eyes. The gulls in the distance were foraging the waters for their last meal before darkness was complete. He listened to their screeches, the dissonance somehow comforting; there was a kind of energy in every struggle to survive. He hoped he would have it.

He dozed, awakening with a start. He looked at his watch, annoyed. It was six minutes past six; his ten minutes had stretched further to fifteen. It was time for the first telephone call, the one he considered least likely to bring results. It would not have to be routed through Lisbon, the chances of a tap so remote as to be practically non-existent. But practically was not totally, therefore his conversation would last no longer than twenty seconds, the minimum amount of time needed for even the most sophisticated tracing equipment to function.

The twenty-second limit was the one he had instructed the French woman to use weeks ago when she had placed calls for him all through the night to a suite of rooms at the hotel on Nebraska Avenue. Twenty seconds was not much time; but a great deal could be said without interruptions. More so in French.

of emergency had to go directly to their superiors in Washington who in turn were authorized to make immediate decisions. No more than twenty intelligence officers in the country had the codes for Lisbon, and no man in Washington ever refused a call from Lisbon. One never knew whether a general, or a nuclear physicist, or a ranking member of the praesidium or the KGB might be the prize.

It was also understood that any abuse of the Lisbon access would result in the severest consequences for the abuser. Bray was amused - grimly - at the concept; the abuse he was about to inflict was beyond anything conceived by the men who made the rules. He looked at the five names and titles he was about to call. The names in themselves were not that unusual; they could probably be found in any telephone book. Their positions, however, could not.

The Secretary of State

The Chairman of the National Security Council

The Director of the Central Intelligence Agency

The Chief Foreign Policy advisor to the President

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

The probability that one, possibly two of these men were *consiglieri* of the Matarese persuaded Bray not to try to send his indictment directly to the President. Taleniekov and he had believed that once the proof was in their hands the two leaders of both their countries could be reached and convinced. It was not true; Presidents and Premiers were too closely guarded, too protected; messages were filtered, words interpreted. The charges of 'traitors' would be dismissed; time not to be wasted on them. Others had to reach Presidents and Premiers. Men whose positions of trust and responsibility were beyond reproach; such men had to bring them the news, not traitors.

The majority if not all of those he was about to call were committed to the well-being of the nation; any one of them would get the ear of the President. It was all he asked for, and none would refuse a call from Lisbon. He picked up the telephone and dialled the overseas operator.

Twenty minutes later the operator called back. Lisbon had, as always, cleared the traffic to Washington quickly; the Secretary of State was on the line.

'This is State One,' said the Secretary. 'Your codes are cleared, Lisbon. What is it?'

'Mr Secretary, within forty-eight hours you'll receive a manilla envelope in the mail; the name Agate will be printed in the upper left corner . . .'

'Agate? *Beowulf Agate?*'

'Please, listen to me, sir. Have the envelope brought directly to you unopened. Inside there's a detailed report describing a series of events which have taken place - and are taking place right now - that amount to a conspiracy to assume control of the government . . .'

'Conspiracy? Please be specific. Communist?'

'I don't think so.'

'You *must* be specific, Mr Scofield. You're a wanted man, and you're abusing the Lisbon connection! Self-seeking cries of alarm from you are not in your interest. Or in the interest of the country.'

'You'll find all the specifics you need in my report. Among them is proof - I repeat, *proof*, Mr Secretary - that there's been a deception in the Senate that goes back twenty years. It's of such magnitude that I'm not at all sure the country can absorb the shock. It may not even be in its interest to expose it.'

'Explain yourself!'

'The explanation's in the envelope. But not a recommendation. I haven't got any recommendations. That's your business. And the President's. Bring the information to him as soon as you get it.'

'I order you to report to me immediately!'

'I'll come out in forty-eight hours, if I'm alive. When I do I want two things: vindication for me and asylum for a Soviet intelligence officer - if he's alive.'

'Scofield, where are you?'

Bray hung up the phone.

He waited ten minutes and placed the second call to Lisbon.

the upper left corner . . .'

It was exactly fourteen minutes past midnight when he completed the final call. Among the men he had reached, were honourable men. Their voices would be heard by the intelligent. He had forty-eight hours. A lifetime.

It was time for a drink. Twice during the placement of call he had looked at the bottle of Scotch, close to rationalizing the necessity of calming his anxieties, but both times rejected the method. Under pressure, he was the coldest man he knew he might not always feel that way, but it was the way he functioned. He deserved a drink now; it would be a fitting salute to the call he was about to make to Senator Joshua Appleton IV, born Julian Guiderone, son of the Shepherd Boy.

The telephone rang, the shock of its sound causing Bray to grip the bottle in his hand, oblivious to the whisky he was pouring. Liquor spilled over the glass onto the counter. *It was impossible!* There was no way the calls to Lisbon could be traced so rapidly. The magnetic trunklines fluctuated hourly, insuring blind origins; the entire system would have to be shut down for a minimum of eight hours in order to trace a single call. Lisbon was an absolute; place a call through it and a man was safe, his location buried until it no longer mattered.

The phone rang again. Not to answer was not to know, the lack of knowledge infinitely more dangerous than any tracing. No matter what, he still had cards to play; or at least the conviction that those cards were playable. He would convey that. He lifted up the phone. 'Yes?'

'Room Two-twelve?'

'What is it?'

'The manager, sir. It's nothing really, but the outside operator has - quite naturally - kept our switchboard informed of your overseas telephone calls. We noticed that you've chosen not to use a credit card, but rather have billed the calls to your room. We thought you'd appreciate knowing that the charges are currently in excess of three hundred dollars.'

Scofield looked over at the depleted bottle of Scotch. Yankee scepticism would not change until the planet blew up; and then the New England bookkeepers would sue the universe.

'Why don't you come up personally and I'll give you the money for the calls. It'll be in cash.'

'Oh, not necessary, not necessary at all, sir. Actually, I'm not at the hotel, I'm at home.' There was the slightest, slightly embarrassed pause. 'In Beverly. We'll just attach . . .'

'Thank you for your concern,' interrupted Bray, hanging up and heading back to the counter and the bottle of Scotch.

Five minutes later he was ready, ice-like calm spreading

through him as he sat down next to the telephone. The words would be there because the outrage was there; he did not have to think about them, they would come easily. What he had thought about was the sequence. Extortion, compromise, weakness, exchange. Someone within the Matarese wanted to talk with him, recruit him for the most logical reasons in the world; he'd give that man - whoever he was - the chance to do both. It was part of the exchange, prelude to escape. But the first step on the tightrope would not be made by Beowulf Agate; it would be made by the son of the Shepherd Boy.

He picked up the phone; thirty seconds later he heard the famous voice laced with the pronounced Boston accent that reminded so many so often of a young President cut down in Dallas.

'Hello? Hello?' The senator had been roused from his sleep; it was in the clearing of his throat. 'Who's there, for God's sake?'

'There is a grave in the Swiss village of Col du Pillon. If there's a body in the coffin below it's not the man whose name is on the stone.'

The gasp on the line was electrifying, the silence that followed a scream suspended in the grip of fear. 'Who? . . .' The man was in shock, unable to form the question.

'There's no reason for you to say anything, Julian . . .'

'Stop it!' The scream was released

'All right, no names. You know who I am - if you don't, the Shepherd Boy hasn't kept his son informed.'

'I won't listen!'

'Yes you will, Senator. Right now that phone is part of your hand; you won't let it go. You can't. So just listen. On 11 November 1943, you and a close friend of yours went to the same dentist on Main Street in Andover, Massachusetts. You had X-rays taken that day.' Scofield paused for precisely one second. 'I have them, Senator. Your office can confirm it in the morning. Your office also can confirm the fact that yesterday a messenger from the General Accounting Office picked up

and sent it to Washington.

There was a quiet, plaintive cry on the line, a moan without words.

'Keep listening, Senator,' continued Bray. 'You've got a chance. If the girl's alive you've got a chance, if she's not you don't. Regarding the Russian, if he's going to die, I'll be the one who kills him. I think you know why. You see, accommodations can be made. What I know I don't want to know. What you do is no concern of mine, not any longer. What you want you've already won, and men like me simply end up working for people like you, that's all that ever happens. Ultimately there's not much difference between any of you. Anywhere. Scofield paused again, the bait was glaring; would he take it?

He did, the whisper hoarse, the statement tentative. 'There are . . . people who want to talk with you.'

'I'll listen. But only after the girl is free, the Russian turned over to me.'

'The X-rays? . . .' The words were rushed, cut off; a man was drowning.

'That's the exchange.'

'How?'

'We'll negotiate it. You've got to understand, Senator, the only thing that matters to me now is me. The girl and I, we just want to get away.'

'What? . . .' Again the man was incapable of forming the question.

'Do I want?' completed Scofield. 'Proof that she's alive, that she can still walk.'

'I don't understand.'

'You don't know much about exchanges, either. A package that's immobile isn't any package at all; it voids the exchange. I want proof and I've got a very powerful pair of binoculars.'

'Binoculars?'

'Your people will understand. I want a telephone number and a sighting. Obviously, I'm in the Boston vicinity. I'll call you in the morning. At this number.'

'There's a debate on the Senate floor, a quorum . . .'

'You'll miss it,' said Bray, hanging up.

The first move had been made; telephones would be in use all night between Washington and Boston. Move and counter-move, thrust and parry, press and check; the negotiations had begun. He looked at the manilla envelopes on the table. Between

calls he had sealed all of them, weighed and stamped them; were ready to go

Except one, and there was no reason to believe he would mail it, the tragedy found in the disappearance of the man and what he might have done. It was time to call his old friend from Paris back.

Bray, thank God! We've been waiting for hours!

'Jee?'

'Ambassador Winthrop.'

'He's there?'

'It's all right. It was handled extremely well. His man, Stanley, assured me that no one could possibly have followed them and for all purposes the ambassador is in Alexandria.'

'Stanley's good.' Scofield felt like yelling to the skies in sheer relief, sheer joy.

Winthrop was alive. The flanks were covered, the Matarese destroyed. He was free to negotiate as he had never negotiated in his life before, and he was the best there was. 'Let me talk to Winthrop.'

'Brandon, I'm on the line. I'm afraid I took the phone from your friend quite rudely. Forgive me, my dear.'

'What happened?' I tried calling you.

'I was hurt - not seriously - but enough to require treatment. I went to a doctor I knew in Fredericksburg. He has a private clinic. It wouldn't do for the eldest of the so-called statesmen to show up at a Washington hospital with a bullet in his arm. I mean, can you imagine Harriman turning up in a Harlem emergency ward with a gunshot wound? . . . I couldn't involve any further, Brandon.'

'Jesus. I should have considered that.'

'You had enough to consider. Where are you?' Outside of Boston. There's so much to tell you, but not on the phone. It's all in the envelope, along with four strips of film. I've got to get it to you right away, and you've got to get it to the President.'

— M.

'Why *not*?' The ambassador was incredulous.

'There are . . . hostages involved. I need time. They'll be killed unless I negotiate.'

'Negotiate? You don't have to negotiate. If you have what you say you have, let the government do it.'

'It takes roughly one pound of pressure and less than a fifth of a second to pull a trigger,' said Scofield. 'I've got to negotiate . . . But you see, I *can* now. I'll stay in touch, pinpoint the exchange ground. You can cover me.'

'Those words again,' said Winthrop. 'They never leave your vocabulary, do they?'

'I've never been so grateful for them.'

'How much time?'

'It depends; it's delicate. Twenty-four, possibly thirty hours. It has to be less than forty-eight; that's the deadline.'

'Get the proof to me, Brandon. There's an attorney, his firm in Boston but he lives in Waltham. He's a good friend. Do you have a car?'

'Yes. I can get to Waltham in about forty minutes.'

'Good. I'll call him; he'll be on the first plane to Washington in the morning. His name is Bergeron; you'll have to get his address from the phone book.'

'No problem.'

It was 1.45 a.m. when Bray rang the bell of the fieldstone house in Waltham. The door was opened by Paul Bergeron, dressed in a bathrobe, creases of concern on his ageing, intelligent face.

'I know I'm not to ask you your name, but would you care to come in? From what I gather, I'm sure you can use a drink.'

'Thanks just the same, but I still have work to do. Here's the envelope, and thanks again.'

'Another time, perhaps.' The attorney looked at the thick manilla envelope in his hand. 'You know, I feel the way Jim St Clair must have felt when he got that last call from Al Haig. Is this some kind of smoking-gun?'

'It's on fire, Mr Bergeron.'

'I called the airline an hour ago; I'm on the 7.55 to Washington. Winthrop will have this by ten in the morning.'

'Thanks. Good night.'

The shift from dawn to daybreak was barely discernible; winter was promised again. By 8.00 it had arrived. Bray stood, his hands on the windowsill, looking out at the ocean, thinking out calmer, warmer seas, wondering if he and Toni would ever sail them. Yesterday there was no hope; today there was and he was primed to function as he had never functioned before. All that was Beowulf Agate would be seen and heard from this day. He had spent his life preparing for the few brief hours that would prolong it the only way that was acceptable to him. He would bring her out or he would die; that had not changed. The fact that he had effectively destroyed the Matarese was almost incidental now. That was a professional objective and he was the best . . . he and the Russian were the best.

He turned from the window and went to the table, surveying the work of the last few hours. It had taken less time than he had projected, so total was his concentration. Each clock was dismantled, every main wheel spring drilled at the spindle, new pinion screws inserted in the ratchet mechanisms, the miniature bolts balanced. Each was now prepared to accept the insertion of bell wires leading to battery terminals that would throw

and north of Phillips Beach. The caption read, *Blasting and excavation to commence . . .*

The irony was splendid.

He opened the telephone book, and found a gunsmith in Salem; he had no reason to look further. He wrote down the address.

It was 8.37. Time to call the lie that went under the name of Joshua Appleton. He got up and went to the bed, deciding impulsively to phone Logan Airport first. He did, and the words he heard were the words he wanted to hear.

'Seven-fifty-five to Washington? That would be Eastern Flight Six-two. Let me check, sir . . . There was a twelve-minute delay but the plane's airborne. No change in the E.T.A.'

Paul Bergeron was on his way to Washington and Robert Winthrop. There would be no delays now, no crisis-conferences, no hastily summoned meetings between ranking arrogant men trying to decide how and when to proceed. Winthrop would call the Oval Office; an immediate audience would be granted and the full might of government would be pitted against the Matarese. And tomorrow morning the senator would be picked up by Secret Service and taken directly to Walter Reed Hospital where he would be subjected to intensive examinations. A twenty-five-year fraud would be exposed, the son destroyed with the Shepherd Boy.

Bray lit a cigarette, sipped his coffee and picked up the phone. He was in full command; he would concentrate totally on his negotiations, on the exchange that would be meaningless to the Matarese.

The senator's voice was tense, exhaustion in his tight delivery. 'Nicholas Guiderone wants to see you.'

'The Shepherd Boy himself,' said Scofield. 'You know my conditions. Does he? Is he prepared to meet them?'

'Yes,' whispered the son. 'A telephone number he agrees to. He's not sure what you mean by a "sighting".'

'Then there's nothing further to talk about. I'll hang up.'

'Wait!'

'Why? It's a simple word; I told you I had binoculars. What else is there to say? He's refused. Goodbye, Senator.'

'No!' Appleton's breathing was audible. 'All right, all right. You'll be told a time and a location when you call the number I give you.'

'I'll be *what*? You're a dead man, Senator. If they want to sacrifice you, that's their business - and yours, I suppose, but not mine.'

'What the hell are you talking about? What's wrong?'

'It's unacceptable. I'm not *told* a time and a location, I tell you and you tell them. Specifically, I give you a location and a *time span*, Senator. Between three and five o'clock this afternoon, at the north windows of Appleton Hall, the ones looking out over Jamaica Pond. Have you got that? Appleton Hall.'

'That *is* the telephone number!'

'You don't say. Have the windows lighted, the woman in one room, the Russian in another. I want mobility, conversation; I want to see them walking, talking, reacting. Is that clear?'

'Yes. Walking . . . reacting.'

'And, Senator, tell your people not to bother looking for me. I won't have the X-rays on me; they'll be with someone else who's been told to send them if I'm not back at a specific bus stop by five-thirty.'

'A *bus* stop?'

'The north road below Appleton Hall is a public bus route. Those buses are always crowded and the long curve around Jamaica Pond makes them slow down. If the rain keeps up they'll be slower than usual, won't they? I'll have plenty of time to see what I want to see.'

'Will you see Nicholas Giudrone?' The question was rushed, on the edge of hysteria

'If I'm satisfied,' said Scofield coldly. 'I'll call you from a phone booth around five-thirty.'

'He wants to talk with you *now*!'

'Mr Vickery doesn't talk to anyone until he checks with the Ritz-Carlton Hotel. I thought that was clear.'

'He's concerned you may have duplicates made; he's very

instantly. I won't get killed for that.'

'He insisted you reach him *now*! He says

'Everything's vital.'

'He says to tell you you're wrong. So ver-

'If I'm satisfied this afternoon he'll have :
later. And you'll have the presidency. Or v

up and crushed out his cigarette. As he had thought, Appleton Hall was the most logical place for Guiderone to hold his hostages. He had tried *not* to think about it when he had driven around the massive estate – the nearness of Toni was an obstruction he could barely surmount – but instinctively he had known it. And because he knew it, his eyes had reacted like the rapid shutters of a dozen cameras clicking off a hundred images. The grounds had space; acres filled with dense trees and thick shrubbery and guards in lean-to shelters positioned around the hill. Such a fortress was a likely target for an invasion – indeed the possibility was obviously never far from Guiderone's mind – and Scofield intended to capitalize on that fear. He would mount an imaginary invasion, its roots in the sort of army the Shepherd Boy understood as well as anyone on earth.

He made a last call before leaving Salem; to Robert Winthrop in Washington. The ambassador might well be tied up for hours at the White House – his advice intrinsic to any decision made by the President – and Scofield wanted first line of protection. It was his only protection, really; imaginary invasions had no invaders.

'Brandon? I haven't slept all night.'

'Neither did a lot of other people, sir. Is this line sterile?'

'I had it electronically checked early this morning. What's happening? Did you see Bergeron?'

'He's on his way. Eastern Flight Six-two. He's got the envelope and will be in Washington by ten.'

'I'll send Stanley to meet him at the airport. I spoke to the President fifteen minutes ago. He's clearing his calendar and will see me at two o'clock this afternoon. I expect it will be a very long meeting. I'm sure he'll want to bring in others.'

'That's why I'm calling now; I thought as much. I've got the exchange ground. Have you a pencil?'

'Yes, go ahead.'

'It's a place called Appleton Hall in Brookline.'

'Appleton? *Senator* Appleton?'

'You'll understand when you get the envelope from Bergeron.'

'My God!'

'The estate's above Jamaica Pond, on a hill called Appleton Hill; it's well known. I'll set the meeting for eleven-thirty tonight; I'll time my arrival exactly. Tell whoever's in charge to start surrounding the hill at eleven-forty-five. Block off the

'Thank you, sir. Thank you for everything. I just want to
free.'

The gunsmith on Salem's Hawthorne Boulevard was be-
amused and pleased that the stranger purchased two gross
Ought-Four shotgun shells during off-season. Tourists were
damn fools anyway, but this one compounded the dan-
foolery of paying good money not only for the shells, but
ten plastic display tubes that the manufacturers supplied
nothing. He spoke with one of those smooth, kinda' oily voice.
Probably a New York lawyer who never had a gun in his hand.
Damn fools.

The rain hammered down, forming pools in the mud as
gruntled crews of construction workers sat in cars waiting for
break in the weather so they could sign in; four hours meant
day's pay, but without signing in there was nothing.

Scofield approached the door of a pre-fabricated shack,
stepping on a plank sinking into the mud in front of the rain-
splashed window. Inside he could see the foreman sitting behind
a desk talking into a telephone. Ten yards to the left was
concrete bunker, a heavy padlock on the steel door, the red
lettered sign stencilled across it explicit.

DANGER
AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL ONLY
SWAMPSCOTT DEV. CORP.

Bray rapped first on the window, distracting the man on the
phone inside the shack, then stepped off the plank and opened
the door.

'Yeah, what is it?' yelled the foreman.

'I'll wait till you're finished,' said Scofield, closing the door.
A sign on the table told the man's name. *A. Patelli*.

'That could be a while, pal! I got a thief on the phone.
fucking thief who says his fucking pansy drivers can't roll because
it's wet out!'

'Don't make it too long, please.' Bray removed his ID card.
He flipped it open, holding it in front of the man. 'You are Mr.
Patelli, aren't you?'

The foreman stared at the very official identification card.

'Yeah.' He turned back to the phone. 'I'll call you back'

thief!' He got out of the chair. 'You government?'

'Yes.'

'What the hell's the matter *now*?'

'Something we don't think you're aware of, Mr Patelli. My unit's working with the Federal Bureau of Investigation . . .'

'The FBI?'

'That's right. You've had several shipments of explosive materials delivered to the site here.'

'Locked up tight and accounted for,' interrupted the foreman. 'Every fucking stick.'

'We don't think so. That's why I'm here.'

'What?'

'There was a bombing two days ago in New York, maybe you read about it. A bank in Wall Street. Oxidation raised several numbers on the serial imprint that blew with the detonating cap, we think it may be traced to one of your shipments.'

'That's fuckin'-a-nuts!'

'Why don't we check?'

The explosives inside the concrete bunker were not sticks, they were solid blocks roughly five inches long, three inches high and two thick, packaged in cartons of twenty-four.

'Prepare a statement of consignment, please,' said Scofield, studying the surface of a brick. 'We were right. These are the ones.'

'A statement of *what*?'

'I'm taking a carton for evidentiary analysis.'

'Who?'

'Look, Mr Patelli, your ass may be in a very tight sling. You signed for these shipments and I don't think you counted. I advise you to co-operate fully. Any indication of resistance could be misinterpreted, after all, it's your responsibility. You're involved, but I'm only the field hand, my word counts.'

'What do you want. What do I write?'

At a hardware store, Bray bought ten dry-cell batteries, ten one-quart plastic containers, a roll of bell wire and a can of black spray-paint. He asked for a very large box to carry everything in through the rain.

He sat in the back seat of his rented car, placed it

clocks into its plastic container, pressing the explosive brick down beside the battery. He listened for the steady tick of the mechanism; it was there. Then he snapped the edges of the cover into place and sealed it with tape.

It was forty-two minutes past noon, the alarms set in sequence, the grooves in the gears locked by the teeth of the pinions, the sequence to begin in precisely eleven hours and twenty-six minutes.

As he had done with the previous nine, he sprayed the container with black paint. A great deal of it soiled the rear seat cushion; he would leave a hundred-dollar bill in the crease.

He inserted the coin in the pay phone; he was in West Roxbury, two minutes from the border of Brookline. He dialled, waited for the line to be answered and roared into the mouthpiece.

'Sanitation?'

'Yes, sir. What can we do for you?'

'Appleton Drive! Brookline! The sewer's packed up! It's all over my *goddamn* front lawn!'

'Where is that, sir?'

'I just told you. Appleton Drive and Beachnut Terrace! It's terrible.'

'We'll dispatch a truck right away, sir.'

'Please, hurry!'

The Sanitation Department van made its way haltingly up Beachnut Terrace towards the intersection of Appleton Drive, its driver obviously checking the sewer drains in the street. When he reached the corner, a man in a dark-blue raincoat flagged him down. It was impossible to go around the man; he moved back and forth in the middle of the street, waving his arms frantically. The driver opened his door and shouted through the rain.

'What's the *mattah*?'

It was the last thing he would say for several hours.

Within the Appleton Hall compound, a guard in a cedar lean-to picked up his wall telephone and told the operator on the switchboard to give him an outside line. He was calling the Sanitation Department in Brookline. One of their vans was on Appleton Drive, stopping every hundred feet or so.

'There are reports of a blockage in the vicinity of Beachnut and Appleton, sir. We have a truck checking it out.'

'Thank you,' said the guard, pushing a button that was the intercom for all stations. He relayed the information and returned to his chair.

What kind of idiot would check out sewers for a living?

Scofield wore the black rain slicker with the stencilled white letters across the back. *Sanitation Dept. Brookline*. It was 3.05. The sighting had started: Antonia and Talenkov standing behind windows on the other side of the estate; the concentration in Appleton Hall would be on the road below. He drove the sanitation van slowly up Appleton Drive, staying close to the kerb, stopping at every sewer drain in the street. As the road was long, there were roughly twenty to thirty such drains. At each stop he got out carrying a six-foot extension snake and whatever other tools he could find in the van that seemed to fit a hastily imagined problem. This was at every stop; at ten however, he added one other item. A five-quart plastic container that had been sprayed black. Seven of them he was able to wedge between the spikes of the wrought-iron fence beyond the sightlines of the lean-to's, pushing them into the foliage with the snake. With three he used what was left of the bell wire and suspended them beneath the grates of the sewers.

At 4.22 he was finished and drove back to Beachnut Terrace, where he began the embarrassing process of reviving the sanitation employee in the rear of the van. There was no time to be solicitous; he removed the rain slicker and slapped the man into consciousness.

'What the hell *happened*?' The man was frightened, recoiling at the sight of Bray above him.

'I made a mistake,' said Scofield simply. 'You can accept that or not, but nothing's missing, no harm's been done, and there is no problem with the sewers.'

'You're crazy!'

Bray took out his money clip. 'I'm sure it appears that way, truck. No one has to

'For the past hour you've been checking the drains along Beachnut and Appleton, that's all anyone has to know. You

were dispatched and did your job. That is, if you want the five hundred.'

'You're crazy!'

'I haven't got time to argue with you. Do you want the money or not?'

The man's eyes bulged. He took the money.

It did not matter whether they saw him now; it only mattered what he saw. His watch read 4.57, three minutes remained before the sighting was terminated. He drove, stopped the car directly below the midpoint of Appleton Hall, rolled down his window and raised the Zeiss-Ikon binoculars to his eyes. He focused through the rain on the lighted windows three hundred yards above.

The first figure to come into view was Taleniekov, but it was not the Taleniekov he had last seen in London. The Russian stood motionless behind the window, the side of his head encased in a bandage, a bulge beneath the open collar of his shirt further evidence of wounds wrapped tightly with heavy gauze. Standing beside the Soviet was a dark-haired muscular man, his hand hidden behind Taleniekov's back. Scofield had the distinct impression that without that man's hand, Taleniekov would collapse. But he was alive, his eyes staring straight ahead blinking every other second or so; the Russian was telling him he was alive.

Bray moved the glasses to the right; his breathing stopped the pounding in his chest like a rapidly accelerating drum in an echo chamber. It was almost more than he could bear; the rain blurred the lenses; he was going out of his mind.

There she *was*! Standing erect behind the window, her head held up, angled first to her left, then to her right, her eyes levelled responding to voices. *Responding*.

And then Scofield saw what he dared not hope to see. Relief swept over him and he wanted to shout through the rain in sheer exuberance. There was fear in Antonia's eyes, to be sure, but there was also something else. *Anger*.

The eyes of his love were filled with anger, and there was nothing on earth that took its place! An angry mind was a mind intact.

He put the binoculars down, rolled up the windows and

started the engine. He had several telephone calls and a final arrangement to make. When these were done, it was time for Mr B. A. Vickery to arrive at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel.

'Were you satisfied?' The senator's voice was more controlled than it had been that morning. The anxiety was still there but it was farther below the surface.

'How badly is the Russian hurt?'

'He's lost blood; he's weak.'

'I could see that. Is he ambulatory?'

'Enough to put him into a car, if that's what you want to do.'

'It's what I want to do. Both he and the woman in my car with me at the exact moment I say. I'll drive the car down to the gate and, on my signal, the gate will be opened. That's when you get the X-rays and we get out.'

'I thought you wanted to kill him?'

'I want something else first. He has information that can make the rest of my life very pleasant, no matter who runs what.'

'I see.'

'I'm sure you do.'

'You said you'd meet with Nicholas Guiderone, listen to what he has to say.'

'I will. I'd be a liar if I didn't admit I had questions.'

'He'll answer everything. When will you see him?'

'He'll know when I check into the Ritz-Carlton. Tell him to call me there. And let's get one thing clear, Senator. A telephone call, no troops. The X-rays won't be in the hotel.'

'Where will they be?'

'That's my business.' Scofield hung up and left the phone booth. He'd place his next call from a booth in the centre of Boston, to check in with Robert Winthrop, as much as to get the ambassador's reaction to the material in the envelope as anything else. And to make sure his protection was being mounted. If there were hitches he wanted to know about them.

'It's Stanley, Mr Scofield.' As always, Winthrop's chauffeur spoke gruffly, not unpleasantly. 'The ambassador's still at the White House; he asked me to come back here and wait for any calls from you. He told me to tell you that everything you asked for is being taken care of. He said I should repeat the times. Eleven-thirty, eleven forty-five and twelve-fifteen.'

'That's what I wanted to hear. Thanks very much.' Bray opened the door of the drugstore telephone booth, and walked over to a counter that sold construction paper and felt markers in varying colours. He chose bright yellow paper and a dark-blue marker.

He went back outside to his car and, using his attaché case for a desk, wrote his message in large, clear letters on the yellow paper. Satisfied, he opened the case, removed the five sealed manilla envelopes, stamped and addressed to five of the nation's most powerful men, and placed them on the seat next to him. It was time to mail them. Then he took out a sixth envelope and inserted the yellow page; he sealed it with tape and wrote on the front.

FOR THE BOSTON POLICE

He drove slowly up Newbury Street looking for the address he had found in the telephone booth. It was on the left side, four doors from the corner, a large painted sign in the window.

*Phoenix Messenger Service
24 Hour Delivery - Medical, Academic, Industrial*

He parked in a space vacated by a taxi, got out and went inside. A thin, prim-looking woman with an expression of serious efficiency rose from her desk and came to the counter.

'May I help you?'

'I hope so,' said Scofield, efficiency in his identification. 'I'm with the NPD. a' as he opened his identification. 'I'm with the NPD. a' ter-depart-
mental Examinations.'

'The police? Good heavens

'There's a message for you, Mr Vickery,' said the desk clerk, holding out a small envelope.

'Thank you,' said Scofield, wondering if beneath the man's white shirt there was a small blue circle inked into his flesh.

The message was only a telephone number. He crumpled it in his hand and dropped it on the counter.

'Is something wrong?' asked the clerk.

Bray smiled. 'Tell that son of a bitch I don't make calls to numbers. Only to names.'

He let the telephone ring three times before he picked it up. 'Yes?'

'You're an arrogant man, Beowulf.' The voice was high pitched, crueller-than-the-wind. It was the Shepherd Boy, Nicholas Guiderone.

'I was right, then,' said Scofield. 'That man downstairs doesn't work full time for the Ritz-Carlton. And when he showers, he can't wash off a small blue circle on his chest.'

'It's worn with enormous pride, sir. They are extraordinary men and women who have enlisted in our extraordinary cause.'

'Where do you find them? People who'll blow themselves away and bite into cyanide?'

'Quite simply, in our companies. Men have been willing to make the ultimate sacrifice for causes since the dawn of time. It does not always have to be on a battlefield, or in a wartime underground, or even in the world of international espionage. There are many causes, I don't have to tell you that.'

'Such as themselves? The *fida'is*, Guiderone? Hasan ibn as-Sabbāh's cadre of assassins?'

'You've studied the *padrone*, I see.'

'Very closely.'

'There are certain practical and philosophical similarities, I will not deny it. These men and women have everything they want on this earth, and when they leave it, their families - wives, children, husbands - will have more than they ever need. Isn't that the dream? With over five hundred companies, computers can select a handful of people willing and capable of entering into this arrangement. A simple extension of the dream, Mr Scofield.'

'Pretty damned extended.'

'Not really. Far more executives collapse from heart seizure

than from violence. Read the daily obituaries. But I'm sure this is only one of many questions. May I send a car for you?

'You may not.'

'There's no cause for hostility.'

'I'm not hostile, I'm cautious. Basically I'm a coward. I'll set a schedule and I intend to stick with it. I'll get there exactly eleven-thirty; you talk, I'll listen. At precisely twelve-fifteen, I'll walk out with the girl and the Russian. A signal will be given, we'll get into the car and drive to your main gate. That's when you'll get the X-rays and we get away. If there's the slightest deviation, the X-rays will disappear. They'll show up somewhere else.'

'We have a right to examine them,' protested Guiderone. 'For accuracy and spectro-analysis; we want to make sure no duplicates were made. We must have time for that.'

The Shepherd Boy bit; the omission of the examination was the weakness Guiderone quite naturally pounced upon. The huge electronic iron gate had to be opened and stay open. If it remained shut, all the troops and all the diversions that could be mounted, would not prevent a man firing a rifle into the car. Bray hesitated. 'Fair enough. Have equipment and a technician down at the gatehouse. Verification will take two or three minutes, but the gate has to remain open while it's being done.'

'Very well.'

'By the way,' added Scofield, 'I meant what I said to you on . . .'

'You mean Senator Appleton, I believe.'

'Believe it. You'll find the X-rays intact, no light-marks or duplication. I won't get killed for that.'

'I'm convinced. But I find a weakness in these arrangements.'

'A weakness? . . . ' Bray felt cold.

'Yes. Eleven-thirty to twelve-fifteen is only forty-five minutes. That's not much time for us to talk. For me to talk and you to listen.'

Scofield breathed again. 'If you're convincing, I'll know where to find you in the morning, won't I?'

Guiderone laughed softly in his eerily high-pitched voice. 'Of course. So simple. You're a logical man.'

'I try to be. Eleven-thirty, then.' Bray hung up.

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time,' he said softly. 'In a little while we're going to walk out of here. Everything's going to be all right. We're going to be free.'

'He wants to talk to you,' she whispered. 'Quickly.'

'What?' Scofield opened his eyes and looked beyond Toni. Across the room Taleniev sat rigidly in an armchair. The Russian's face was pale, so pale it was like chalk, the left side of his head taped; his ear and half his cheek had been blown away. His neck and shoulder blade were also bandaged, encased in a T-squared metal brace; he could barely move them. Bray held Antonia's hand and approached. Taleniev was dying. 'We're getting out of here,' said Scofield. 'We'll take you to a hospital. It'll be all right.'

The Russian shook his head slowly, painfully, deliberately.

'He can't talk, darling.' Toni touched Vasili's right cheek. 'He has no voice.'

'Jesus! What did they . . . ? Never mind, in forty-five minutes we're driving out of here.'

Again Taleniev shook his head; the Russian was trying to tell him something.

'When the guards were helping him down the staircase, he had a convulsion,' said Antonia. 'It was terrible, they were pulled down with him and were furious. They kept hitting him - and he's in such pain.'

'They were pulled down . . . ?' asked Bray, wondering, looking at Taleniev.

The Russian nodded, reaching under his shirt to the belt underneath. He pulled out a gun and shoved it across his legs towards Scofield.

'He fell all right,' whispered Bray, smiling, kneeling down and taking the weapon. 'You can't trust these Commie bastards.' Then he shifted into Russian, putting his lips close to Taleniev's right ear. 'Everything's clean. We've got men outside. I've set explosive charges all around the hill. They want the proof I've got; we'll get out.'

The KGB man once more shook his head. Then he stopped, his eyes wide, gesturing for Scofield to watch his lips.

The words were formed; *Pazhar . . . vsyegda pazhar.*

Bray translated into English. 'Fire, always fire?'

Taleniev nodded, then formed other words, a barely audible whisper now emerging. '*Zazhiganiye . . . pazhar.*'

'At my fingertips?'

'The words are yours. The Russian used them, but they were yours. Under chemical inducement, multi-lingual subjects speak the language of their sources . . . *Paralysis*, Mr Scofield. Governments must be paralysed. Nothing achieves this more rapidly & more completely than the rampant global chaos of what we call terrorism.'

'Chaos . . .' Bray whispered; *that* was the word he kept coming back to, never sure why. *Chaos*. Clashing bodies in space . . .

'Yes. Chaos!' repeated Guiderone, his startling dark eyes wide, two shining black stones reflecting the light of the desk lamp. 'When the chaos is complete, when civilian and military authorities are impotent, admitting they cannot destroy thousand vanishing wolfpacks with tanks and warheads and tactical weapons, then men of reason will move in. The period of violence will at last be over and this world can go about the business of living productively.'

'In a nuclear ash-heap?'

'There'll be no such consequences. We've tested the controls we have men at them.'

'What the hell are you talking about?'

'Governments, Mr Scofield!' shouted Guiderone, his eyes on fire. 'Governments are obsolete! They can no longer be permitted to function as they have functioned throughout history. If they do, this planet will not see the next century. Governments . . . we have known them are no longer viable entities. They must be replaced.'

By whom? With what?

The old man softened his voice; it became hollow, hypnotic. 'By a new breed of philosopher-kings, if you like. Men who understand this world as it has truly emerged, who measure its potential in terms of resources, technology and productivity, who care not one whit about the colour of a man's skin, or the heritage of his ancestors, or what idols he may pray to. Who care only about his full productive potential as a human being. And his contribution to the market-place.'

'My God!' said Bray quietly. 'You're talking about conglomerates.'

'Does it offend you?'

'Not if I owned one.'

'Very good.' Guiderone broke into a jackal-like laugh; it

disappeared instantly. 'But that's a limited point of view. There are those among us who thought you of all people would understand. You've seen the other futility; you've lived it.'

'By choice.'

'Very, very good. But that presumes there is no choice in our structure. Untrue. A man is free to develop his full potential; the greater his productivity, the greater his freedom and rewards.'

'Suppose he doesn't want to be productive? As you define it.'

'Then obviously there's a lesser reward for the lesser contribution.'

'Who does define it?'

'Trained units of management personnel, using all the technology developed in modern industry.'

'I guess it'd be a good idea to get to know them.'

'Don't waste time with sarcasm. Such teams operate daily all over the world. The international companies are not in business to lose money or forfeit profits. The system works. We prove it every day. The new society will function within a competitive, non-violent structure. Governments can no longer guarantee that, they're on nuclear collision courses everywhere. But the Chrysler Corporation does not make war on Volkswagen; no planes fill the skies to wipe out factories and whole towns centred on one or the other company. The new world will be committed to the market-place, to the developing of resources and technology that insure the productive survival of mankind. There's no other way. The multi-national community is proof; it is aggressive, highly competitive, but it is non-violent. It bears no arms.'

'Chaos,' said Bray, his eyes locked with the Shepherd Boy's. 'The clashing of bodies in space . . . destruction before the creation of order.'

'Yes, Mr Scofield. The period of violence before the permanent era of tranquillity. But governments and their leaders do not relinquish their responsibilities easily. Alternatives must be given men whose backs are to the wall.'

'Alternatives?'

'In Italy, we control nearly twenty per cent of the Parliament. In Bonn, twelve per cent of the *Bundestag*; in Japan, almost thirty-one per cent of the *Diet*. Could we do this without the *Brigata Rossa* or Baader-Meinhof ~~Army~~ ^{Army} of ^{act} Japan? We grow in authority . . .

terrorism we are closer to our objective: the total absence of violence.'

'That wasn't what Guillaume de Matarese had in mind seven years ago.'

'It's much closer than you think. The *padrone* wanted to destroy the corrupters in governments, which all too frequently meant entire governments themselves. He gave us the structure, the methods — hired assassins to pit political factions against adversaries everywhere. He provided the initial fortune to put it all in motion; he showed us the way to chaos. All that remained was to put something in its place. We have found it. We'll save the world from itself. There can be no greater cause.'

'You're convincing,' said Scofield. 'I think we may have a basis for talking further.'

'I'm glad you think so,' answered Guiderone, his voice suddenly cold again. 'It's gratifying to know one is convincing, but much more interesting to watch the reactions of a liar.'

'Liar?'

'You could have been part of this!' Once more the old man shouted. 'After that night in Rock Creek Park, I myself convened the council. I told it to re-assess, re-evaluate! Beowulf Agat could be of incalculable value. The Russian was useless, but not *you*. The information you possessed could make a mockery of Washington's moral positions. I myself would have made you director of all security! On my instructions, we tried for weeks to reach you, bring you in, make you one of us. It is, of course, no longer possible. You're relentless in your *deceptions*! In short words, you cannot be trusted. You can *never* be trusted!'

Bray sat forward. The Shepherd Boy was a maniac; it was in the maniacal eyes set in the hollows of his pale, gaunt skull. He was a man capable of quiet, seemingly logical discourse, but irrationality ruled him. He was a bomb; a bomb had to be controlled. 'I wouldn't forget the purpose of my coming here if I were you.'

'Your *purpose*? By all means it will be achieved. You want the woman? You want Talenickov? They're yours! You'll be together, I assure you. You will be taken from this house and driven far away, never to be heard from again, no loss to anyone.'

'Let's deal, Guiderone. Don't make any foolish mistakes. You have a son who can be the next President of the United

'Next January they'll have the White House! The administration will be *their* administration.'

'That won't happen.'

'It *will* happen!' shouted Guiderone in his high-pitched voice. 'And the world will be a better place. *Everywhere!* The period of violence will stop – a thousand years of productive tranquillity will take its place.'

'A thousand years . . . ?' Scofield got to his feet. 'Another maniac said that once. Is it going to be your own personal thousand-year Reich?'

'Parallels are meaningless, labels irrelevant! There's no connection.' The Shepherd Boy rose behind his desk, his eyes again on fire. 'In our world, nations can keep their leaders, people their identities. But governments will be controlled by the *companies*. *Everywhere!* The values of the market-place will link the peoples of the world!'

Bray caught the word and it revolted him. '*Identities?* In your world there *are* no identities! We're numbers and symbols on computers! Circles and squares.'

'We must forget degrees of self for the continuity of peace.'

'Then we are *robots!*'

'But alive. Functioning!'

'How? Tell me *how?* "You, there! you're not a person any more; you're a *factor*. You're *X* or *Y* or *Z*, and whatever you do is measured and stored on wheels of tape by experts trained to evaluate *factors*. Go on *factor!* Be productive or the experts take your loaf of bread away . . . or the shiny new car!"'

Scofield paused in a fever. 'You're wrong, Guiderone. *So* wrong. Give me an imperfect place where I know who I am.'

'Find it in the next world, Beowulf Agate!' screamed the Shepherd Boy. 'You'll be there soon enough!'

Bray felt the weight in his belt under his raincoat – the gun supplied by the dying Talenickov. The visitor to Appleton Hall had been searched thoroughly for weapons, none found, yet one provided by his old enemy. The decision to make a final gesture was clinical; there was no hope after all. But before he tried to kill and was killed, he would see Guiderone's face when he told him. 'You said before that I was a liar, but you have no idea how extensive my lies were. You think you have the X-rays, don't you?'

'We know we have them.'

words: crueller than the wind. 'His presence I believe explains the death of Anthony Blackburn. Perhaps I should introduce you to a few of the others, *in absentia* . . . In the centre of the table, directly below the platform is the Secretary of State; next to him the Soviet ambassador. Across from the ambassador is the director of the Central Intelligence Agency; he seems to be having a side conversation with the Soviet Commissar for Planning and Development, Moscow. One man you might be interested in is missing. He didn't belong, you see, but he telephoned the CIA after receiving a very strange telephone call routed through Lisbon. The President's chief adviser on foreign affairs. He's had an accident; his mail is being intercepted, the last X-rays are no doubt in our hands by now . . . Need I go on?' Guiderone started to pull the cord, shutting out the window.

Scofield put up his hand; the curtain arced before closing. He was not looking at the men at the table; the message was clear. He was looking at a guard stationed at a small recessed door to the right of the fireplace. The man stood at attention, his eyes forward. In his hand was a .30 calibre, magazine-loaded sub-machine gun.

Talenickov had known about these betrayals at the highest levels. He had heard the words spoken by others as they had inserted the needles that further drained his life away.

His enemy had tried to give him his last chance to live. His last chance. What were the words?

Pazhar . . . vsyegda pazhar! Zazhiganiye pazhar!

When the explosions begin, fire will follow.

He was not sure what his enemy meant, but he knew it was the path he had to follow. They were the best there were. One trusted the only professional on earth that was one's equal.

And that meant exercising the control his equal would demand. No false moves now. Stanley stood by Winthrop's wheelchair, his gun levelled at Bray. If somehow he could turn, twist, . . . the weapon from under his raincoat . . . He looked down at Winthrop, his attention caught by the old man's eyes. Winthrop was trying to tell him something, just as Talenickov had tried to tell him something. It was in the eyes; the old man kept shifting them to his right. That was it! Stanley was *by* the wheelchair now, not *behind* it. In tiny, imperceptible movements, Winthrop was edging his chair around; he was going to go after

great honour to their parishes. Those simple priests in the hills of Porto Vecchio perceived my genius before I did. They spoke to the *padrone*, petitioning him to sponsor my studies. . . . Guillaume de Matarese did so in ways far beyond their comprehension.'

Forty seconds. Winthrop was within two feet of the gun. Keep talking!

'Matarese made his arrangements with Appleton then? Joshua Appleton the Second.'

'America's industrial expansion was extraordinary. It was the logical place for a gifted young man with a fortune at his disposal.'

'You were married? You had a son.'

'I bought a vessel, the most perfectly formed female through which to bear children. The design was always there.'

'Including the death of young Joshua Appleton?'

'An accident of war and destiny. The decision was a result of the Captain's own exploits, not part of the original design. It was, instead, an unparalleled opportunity to be seized upon. I think we've said enough.'

Now! Winthrop lunged out of the chair, his hands gripping Stanley's gun, pulling it to him, every ounce of his strength clawing at the weapon, refusing to let it go.

It fired, as Bray pulled out his own gun, aiming it at the chauffeur. Winthrop's body arched in the air, his throat blown away. Scofield squeezed the trigger once; it was all he needed. Stanley fell.

'Stay away from that desk!' yelled Bray.

'You were *searched*! It's not possible. Where? . . .'

'From a better man than any computer of yours could ever find!' said Scofield, looking briefly in anguish at the dead Robert Winthrop. 'Just as he was.'

'You'll never get out.'

Bray sprang forward, grabbing Nicholas Guiderone by the throat, pushing him against the desk. 'You're going to do what I tell you to do or I'll blow your eyes out!' He shoved the pistol up into the hollow of Guiderone's right eye.

'Do *not* kill me!' commanded the overlord of the Matarese. 'The value of my life is too extraordinary! My work is not finished; it must be finished before I die!'

'You're everything in this world I hate, Shepherd Boy,' said Scofield, jamming the gun in sharp cracks into the old man's

you. I'd advise you not to be so cavalier . . .'

'Okay, okay.' The sergeant tore open the envelope, and pulled out a sheet of yellow paper. He unfolded it and read the words printed in large blue letters. 'Jesus Christ on a fuckin' raft!' he said quietly, his eyes suddenly widening in astonishment. He looked down at the disapproving woman as if he were seeing her for the first time. As he stared, he reached over to the button on the desk; he pressed it repeatedly.

'Sergeant, I strenuously object to your profanity . . .'

Above every visible door in the precinct house, red light began flashing on and off; from deep within, the sound of an alarm bell echoed off the walls of unseen rooms and corridors. In seconds, doors began opening and helmeted men came out, hastily donned two-inch shields of canvas and steel strapped over their chests.

'Grab her!' shouted the sergeant. 'Pin her arms! Throw her into the bomb room!'

Seven police officers converged on the woman. A precinct lieutenant came running out of his office. 'What the hell is it, Sergeant?'

'Look at this!'

The lieutenant read the words on the yellow paper. 'Oh, my God!'

*To the Fascist Pigs of Boston, Protectors
of the Alabaster Bride.*

Death to the Economic Tyrants! Death to Appleton Hill!

As Pigs Read This Our Bombs Will Do What

Our Pleas Cannot. Our Suicide Brigades Are

Positioned To Kill All Who Flee The Righteous

Holocaust. Death To Appleton Hill!

Signed:

The Third World Army of Liberation and Justice

The lieutenant issued his instructions. 'Guiderone's got guards all around that place; reach the house! Then call Brookline, tell them what's going on, and raise every patrol car we've got in the vicinity of Jamaica Way; send them over.' The officer paused, peering at the yellow page with the precise blue letters printed on it, then added harshly, 'Goddamn it! Get Central Headquarters on the line. I want their best SWAT team dispatched to Appleton Hill.' He started back to his office, pausing again to

look in disgust at the woman being propelled through a door, arms pulled, stretched away from her sides, prodded by men with padded shields and helmets. 'Third World Army of Liberation of Justice! Freaked-out bastards! *Book her,*' he roared.

Scotfield dragged the guard's body across the room, concealing it behind Guiderone's desk. He raced over to the dead Shepherd Boy, and for the briefest of moments, just stared at the arrogant face. If it were possible to kill beyond killing, Bray would do so now. He pulled Guiderone to the far corner, throwing his body in a crumpled heap. He then stopped at Winthrop's corpse, wishing there was time to somehow say goodbye. There was not.

He grabbed the guard's sub-machine gun off the floor and ran over to the curtains. He pulled them open and looked at his watch. Fifty seconds to go until the explosions would begin. He checked the weapon in his hands; all clips were full. He looked through the window into the conference room, seeing what he had not seen before because the man had not been there before.

The senator had arrived. All eyes were now on him, the magnetic presence mesmerizing the entire room; the easy grace the worn, still-handsome face giving each man his attention, if only for an instant - telling that man he was special. And each man was seduced by the raw power of power; this was the next President of the United States and he was one of *them*.

For the first time in all the years Scotfield had seen that face, he saw what a destroyed, alcoholic mother saw: it was a mask. A brilliantly conceived, ingeniously programmed mask . . . and mind.

Twelve seconds.

There was a burst of static from a speaker on the desk. A voice erupted 'Mr Guiderone, we must interrupt! We've had calls from the Boston and Brookline police! There are reports of an armed attack on Appleton Hall. Men calling themselves the Third World Army of Liberation and Justice. We have no such organization on any list, sir. Our patrols are alerted. The police want everyone to stay . . .'

Two seconds.

The news had been relayed to the conference room. Men leaped up from chairs, gathering papers. Their own particular

panic was breaking out: how could the presence of such men be explained? Who would explain it?

One second.

Bray heard the first explosion beyond the walls of Appleton Hall. It was in the distance, far down the hill, but unmistakable. The sound of rapid-fire weapons followed; men were shooting at the source of the first explosions.

Inside the conference room, the panic mounted. The *consiglieri* of the Matarese were rushing around, a single guard at the archway exit poised with his sub-machine gun levelled through the arch. Suddenly Scofield realized what the powerful men were doing: they were throwing papers and pads and maps into the fire at the end of the room.

It was his moment; the guard would be first, but merely the first.

Bray smashed the window with the barrel of his automatic weapon and opened fire. The guard span as the bullets caught him. His sub-machine gun was on rapid-repeat; the death-pressure of his trigger finger caused the gun to erupt wildly, the spray of .30 calibre shells flying out of the ejector, the bullets fanning out in all directions, walls and chandeliers and men bursting, exploding, collapsing under their impacts. Screams of death and shrieks of horror filled the room.

Scofield knew his targets, his eye rehearsed over a lifetime of violence. He smashed the jagged fragments of glass and raised the weapon to his shoulder. He squeezed the trigger in rapidly defined, reasonably aimed sequences. One step - one death - at a time.

The bursts of gunfire exploded through the window frame. The general fell, the pointer in his hand lacerating his face as he collapsed. The Secretary of State cowered at the side of the table; Scofield blew his head off. The director of the Central Intelligence Agency raced his counterpart from the National Security Council towards the arch, leaping over bodies in their hysteria. Bray caught them both. The director's throat was a mass of blood; the NSC chairman raised his hands to a forehead that was no longer there.

Where was he? He of all men had to be found!

There he was!

The senator was crouched below the conference table in front of the roaring fire. Scofield took the aim of his life and squeezed

march and held it to the soft fabric. It caught fire instantly. The Russian held out his hand for Scofield. 'Help me . . . get up!'

Bray pulled him off the floor; Talenickov clutched the last pillow to his chest. The seventh explosion was heard in the distance; staccato gunfire followed, piercing the screams of hysteria from within the house.

'Come on!' yelled Scofield, putting his arm around the Russian's waist. He looked over at Toni; she had set fire to the fourth pillow. Flames and smoke were filling the room. 'Come on! We're getting out!'

'No!' whispered Talenickov. 'You! She! Get me to the door.' The Russian held the pillow and lurched forward.

The great hall of the house was dense with smoke, flames from the inner conference room surging beneath doors and through archways, as men raced up the staircase to windows, vantage points - high ground - to aim their weapons at invaders.

A guard spotted them; he raised his sub-machine gun.

Scofield fired first; the man arched backwards, blown off his feet.

'Listen to me!' gasped Talenickov. 'Always *pazhar!* With you it is sequence, with me it is fire!' He held up the soft pillow. 'Light this! I will have the race of my life!'

'Don't be a fool.' Bray tried to take the pillow away; the Russian would not permit it.

'*Nyet!*' Talenickov stared at Scofield; a final plea was in his eyes. 'If I could, I would not care to live like this. Neither would you. Do this for me, Beowulf. I would do it for you.'

Bray returned the Russian's look. 'We've worked together,' he said simply. 'I'm proud of that.'

'We were the best there were.' Talenickov smiled and raised his hand to Scofield's cheek. 'Now, my friend. Do what I would do for you.'

Bray nodded and turned to Antonia; there were tears in her eyes. He took the book of matches from her hand, struck one and held it beneath the pillow.

The flames leapt up. The Russian spun in place, clutching the fire to his chest. And with the roar of a wounded animal suddenly set free from the jaws of a lethal trap, Talenickov lunged, propelling himself into a limping run, careening off the walls and doors, pressing the flaming pillow and himself into everything he touched - and everything he touched caught fire. Two guards

There were men; they had weapons and they were using them. The glass of the windshield shattered as a fusillade of bullets came from the open garage doors.

Antonia had rolled down the window; she now pushed the gun through the frame, held the trigger against its rim, and the explosions once again vibrated through the racing automobile. Bodies lurched as screams and the shattering of glass and the screeching ricochets of bullets filled the cavernous garage of the carriage house. The last clip of ammunition was exhausted as Scofield, his face cut from the windshield fragments, came to the final two hundred yards towards the gates of Appleton Hall. There were men below, armed men, uniformed men, but they were not soldiers of the Matarese. Bray thrust his hand down to the knob of the light switch and repeatedly pushed it in and pulled it out. The headlights flickered on and off – in sequence, *always* sequence. A sequence was a signal of a thousand possibilities; in this case it was survival.

The gates had been forced open; he slammed his foot on the brake. The automobile skidded to a stop, tyres screeching.

The police converged. Then more police; black-suited men in paramilitary gear, men trained for a specialized warfare, the battlegrounds defined by momentary bursts of armed fanaticism. Their commander approached the car.

'Take it easy,' he said to Bray. 'You're out. Who are you?'

'Vickery. B. A. Vickery. I had business with Nicholas Guiderone. As you say . . . we got out! When that hell broke loose, I grabbed my wife and we hid in a closet. They smashed into the house, in teams, I think. Our car was outside. It was the only chance we had.'

'Now calmly, Mr Vickery, but quickly. What's happening up there?'

The tenth charge detonated from the other side of the hill, but its light was the flames that were spreading across the crest of the hill.

Appleton Hall was being consumed by fire, the explosions more frequent now as more arsenals were opened, more ignited. The Shepherd Boy was fulfilling his destiny. He had found his Villa Matarese, and like his *padrone* seventy years ago, his remains would perish in its skeleton.

'What's happening, Mr Vickery?'

'They're killers. They've killed everyone inside; they'll kill

- even one of you they can. You won't take them alive.'
Then we'll take them dead! and the commander, his voice
filled with emotion. They've come over here now, they've come
come over. Italy, Germany, Mexico ... Lebanon, Israel, Hussein
Aires. Whatever made us think we were immune? ... Pull your
car out of here. Mr. Vickery. Head down the road about a
quarter of a mile. There are ambulances down there. We'll get
your statements later.

'Yes sir' said Schofield, starting the engine.

They passed the ambulances at the base of Appleton Drive and
turned left onto the road for Boston. Soon they would cross the
Longfellow Bridge into Cambridge. There was a locker on the
MBTA subway platform in Harvard Square; in that locker was
his attaché case.

They were free. The serpent had died at Appleton Hall, but
they were free. They were free. They were free.
Because he had disappeared at last.

Epilogue

Men and women were taken into custody swiftly, quietly, no charges processed through the courts, for their crimes were beyond the sanity of the courts, beyond the tolerance of the nation. Of all nations Each dealt with the Matarese in its own way. Where it could find them

· Heads of state across the world conferred by telephone, the normal interpreters replaced by ranking government personnel fluent in the necessary languages. The leaders readily professed astonishment and shock, tacitly acknowledging both the inadequacy and the infiltration of their intelligence communities. They tested one another with subtle shades of accusation, knowing the attempts were futile; they were not idiots. They probed for vulnerabilities, they all had them And with every word, each hoped for the reaction the other wanted to hear. Finally - tacitly - the single conclusion was universal. It was the only one that made sense in these insane times.

Silence.

Each to be responsible for his own deception, none to implicate the others beyond the normal levels of suspicion and hostility. For to admit the massive global conspiracy was to admit the existence of the fundamental proposition: Governments were obsolete.

None cared for the theory to be analysed or even wide exposure; the analysis was never deep enough, the narrative too attractive in its simplicity.

They were not idiots. They were afraid.

In Washington, rapid decisions were made secretly by a handful of men.

Senator Joshua Appleton IV died as he had come into being. Burned to death in an automobile accident on a dark highway at night. There was a state funeral, the casket mounted in splendour in the Rotunda, where another vigil took place. The words intoned were befitting a man everyone knew would have occupied the White House but for the tragedy that had cut him down . . . on a dark highway at night.

A government-owned Lockheed Tristar was sacrificed in the Colorado Mountains north of Poudre Canyon, a dual engine malfunction causing the aircraft to lose altitude while crossing that dangerous range. The pilot and crew were mourned, full pensions granted their families regardless of their length of service. But the true mourning was accompanied by a tragic lesson never to be forgotten. For it was revealed that on board the plane were three of the nation's most distinguished men, killed in the service of their country while on an inspection tour of military installations relating to counter-strike preparedness. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff had requested his counterparts at the Central Intelligence Agency and the National Security Council to accompany him on the tour. Along with a message of presidential sorrow, an executive order was issued from the Oval Office. Never again were such high-ranking

personnel permitted to fly together in a single aircraft; the nation could not sustain such a grievous loss again. As the weeks went by upper-echelon employees of the State Department as well as numerous reporters who covered its day-to-day operations were gradually aware of an oddity. The Secretary of State had not been in evidence for a very long time. There was a growing concern as schedules were altered, trips abandoned, conferences postponed or cancelled. Rumours spread throughout the capitol, some quarters insisting the secretary was involved with prolonged, secret negotiations in Peking, while others claimed he was in Moscow, close to a breakthrough with SALT. Then the rumours took on less attractive colorations; something was wrong; an explanation was required.

The President gave it on a warm afternoon in spring. He went on radio and television from a medical retreat in Moore-

field, West Virginia, the mountains of the Shenandoah behind him in the distance.

'In this year of tragedy, it is my burden to bring you further sorrow. I have just said goodbye to a dear friend. A great and courageous man who understood the delicate balance required in our negotiations with our adversaries, who would not permit those adversaries to learn of his rapidly ebbing life. That extraordinary life ended only hours ago, succumbing at last to the ravages of disease. I have today ordered the flags of the capitol ...'

And so it went. All over the world.

The President sat back in his chair as Under-Secretary Daniel Congdon walked into the Oval Office. The commander-in-chief did not like Congdon, there was a ferret-like quality about him, his overly-sincere eyes concealing a dreadful ambition. But the man did his job well and that was all that mattered. Especially now, especially this job.

'What's the resolution?'

'As expected, Mr President. Beowulf Agate rarely did the normal thing.

'He didn't lead much of a normal life, did he? I mean you people didn't expect him to, did you?'

'No, sir. He was ...'

'Tell me, Congdon,' interrupted the President. 'Did you really try to have him killed?'

'It was mandatory execution, sir. We considered him beyond salvage, working with the enemy, dangerous to our men everywhere. To a degree, I still believe that.'

'You'd better. He is. So that's why he insisted on negotiating through you. I'd advise you - no, I *order* you - to push such mandatory actions out of your mind. Is that understood?'

'Yes, Mr President.'

'I hope so. Because if it isn't, I might have to issue a mandatory sentence of my own. Now that I know how it's done.'

'Understood, sir.'

'Good. The resolution?'

'Beyond the initial demand, ~~Scoble~~ ^{Scoble} ~~is nothing further~~ do with us.'

'But you know who ...'

'Yes, sir. The Caril documents are.'

'Don't bother to look for them; he's better than you. And leave him alone; never give him the slightest reason to think you have any interest in him. Because if you do, those documents will surface in a hundred different places at once. This government - this nation - cannot handle the repercussions. Not now. There are still too many questions, too many answers we don't have, too many men we can't find. Perhaps in a few years, but not now.'

'I accept that judgement, Mr President.'

'You damn well better. What did the resolution cost us and where is it buried?'

'One hundred and seventy-six thousand, four hundred and twelve dollars and eighteen cents. It was attached to a cost over-run for naval training equipment, the payment made by a CIA proprietary directly to the shipyard in Mystic, Connecticut.'

The President looked out the window at the White House lawn; the blossoms on the cherry trees were dying, curling up and withering away. 'He could have asked for the sky and we would have given it to him; he could have taken us for millions. Instead, all he wants is a boat and to be left alone.'

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The sixty-eight-foot charter yawl, *Serpent*, its mainsail luffing in the island breezes, glided into its slip, the woman jumping on to the pier, rope in hand. She looped it around the forward post, securing the bow. At the stern, the bearded skipper tied off the wheel, stepped up on the gunwhale and over to the back, swinging the aft rope around the nearest post, pulling it out, knotting it when all slack had vanished.

At midships, a pleasant-looking, middle-aged couple stepped cautiously on to the pier. It was obvious they had said their goodbyes, and those goodbyes had been just a little bit painful.

'Well, vacation's over,' said the man, sighing, holding his wife's arm. 'We'll be back next year, Captain Vickery. You're the best charter in the islands. And thank you again, Mrs Vickery. As always, the galley was terrific.'

The couple walked up the dock.

'I'll take down the sails and stow the gear while you check on the supplies, okay?' said Scofield.

'All right, darling. We've got ten days before the couple from New Orleans arrive.'

prestige to suffer in the international market-place.

The President, upon learning of the final legal resolutions, sent the following wire to the executors:

'It seems fitting to me that during the week that marks my first year in office, the obstructions have been removed and, once again, a great American institution is in a position to export and expand American knowhow and technology across the world, joining the other great companies to give us a better world. I congratulate you.'

Bray shoved the paper aside. 'The subtlety gets less and less, doesn't it?'

They tacked into the wind out of Basseterre, the coast of St Kitts receding behind them. Antonia pulled the jib taut, tied off the sheet and climbed back to the wheel. She sat beside Scofield, running her fingers over the short, clipped beard that was more grey than dark. 'Where are we going, darling?' she asked.

'I don't know,' said Bray, meaning it. 'With the wind for a while, if it's all right with you.'

'It's all right with me.' She leaned back, looking at his face, so pensive, so lost in thought. 'What's going to happen?'

'It's happened. The mergers have taken over the earth,' he answered, smiling. 'Guiderone was right; nobody can stop it. Maybe nobody should. Let them have their day in the sun. It doesn't make any difference what I think. They'll leave me one - leave us alone. They're still afraid.'

'Of what?'

'Of people. Just people. Trim the jib, will you please? We're spilling too much. We can make better time.'

'To where?'

'Damned if I know. Only that I want to be there.'

